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THE 

ISLANDERS.

- - A ROMANCE OF - -

MARTHA'S • VINEYARD,

- - BY - -

EVELYN WOODFORD WARE.

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THE ISLANDERS

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MARTHA'S VINEYARD.

BY
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BY

CHARLES STRAHAN.

PROLOGUE.

ARTHA'S VINEYARD — as everybody ought to know — but as here and there a benighted reader may think it is a snug little island south of the Massachusetts coast, about half a dozen miles from the main land, and perhaps three or four times that distance from the nearest point of Nantucket. In earlier times — not in a former century, but previous to the comparatively recent influx of summer sojourners — its people had been largely sufficient unto themselves, never, perhaps, boasting the quaintness which is supposed to be a distinguishing characteristic of Nantucket, but in some portions of it at least exhibiting sufficient insular peculiarities to interest the tourist in a marked degree.

Besides Oak Bluffs, which has since been incorporated into the town of Cottage City, there are the neighboring villages of Exham, Wexham, Tisbury, and Chilmark, and the Indian settlement at Gay Head; which, together with Gosnold Town over on Cuttyhunk, and the neighboring island of Chappaquiddic, constitute the sovereign county of Dukes County. Indeed, this little domain is a veritable commonwealth in itself, with its own courts, its own political conventions, its own "governor" when poor old Cary was alive, and a whole tribe of Indians.

But while there may be little now in the *personnel*

of any of the Island white communities to distinguish them from aggregations of people similarly situated in other parts of the State, — except possibly a somewhat higher average of intelligence than elsewhere prevails, — the physical characteristics of the island remain unchanged, and constitute it one of the most interesting spots on the whole New England shore.

The villages in the north and east sections, which, for the purposes of this narration, have been designated as Exham and Wexham, are beautiful for situation, each after its kind, — the one, embowered in evergreen and oak, and rising by easy gradation from the waters of the sound to the eminence overlooking the charming lake of Tashmoo, suggesting to the passing voyager the vine-clad slopes and olive-crowned hills of the Mediterranean hamlets; the other low-lying, but picturesque, skirting the loveliest and safest harbor on the coast, and exhibiting in its dwellings the substantial architecture of two centuries ago, as well as the more pretentious edifices of to-day.

On the south, the mighty ocean sweeps in unchecked majesty, its huge billows towering heavenward for the final assault, then falling with far-resounding roar upon the beach, and sending their spray across the narrow strip of sand into the broad lagoon whose depths teem with white perch, and whose coves are the haunts of myriads of wild fowl. At the extreme west rise the far-famed cliffs of Gay Head, the home of the remnant of that tribe of redmen who once dominated the island,

while the hills and meadows and shady groves of Chilmark and Tisbury present scenes of unsurpassed pastoral beauty. Chappaquiddic, a natural bulwark between the ocean and the tranquil southeastern shore, with its steep bluffs overhanging the harbor, its long, vanishing beaches and forest-crowned heights (not to mention its remnant of a once numerous tribe of Indians) has long been an object of interest to tourists fond of departing from the beaten paths, and is now attracting the more general attention of lovers of primeval nature.

Of Cottage City, the successor of the primitive camp meeting which the Methodist fathers instituted more than fifty years ago, and whose marvellous growth has been the astonishment of all familiar with its progress, it is unnecessary to speak here. In the "season" it is populous, it is mirthful; its six hundred inhabitants swell to six thousand; it has all the appointments of a permanent city with the freedom and carelessness of a camp; it throbs with the music of bands and is radiant with the electric light. But it is the creature of to-day — or at best of yesterday — and carries its whole history and tells its own story in the moving throngs and the fanciful dwellings which present themselves to the newcomer.

Whether the popularity of the Island as a summer resort has proved an unmixed blessing to its resident inhabitants is at least debatable, but that is a matter with which this history has no concern. Certain it is, that while owners of land have in many instances found their property greatly enhanced in value;

while farmers are assured a large and convenient market for the produce of their farms, and boatmen are enabled to supplement the scanty returns from the sea with the shekels of the stranger who goes along to help (or hinder) the enterprise,—on the other hand, the father finds that the daughters of the city have aroused in the minds of his own girls a desire for greater and more expensive personal adornment; the mother sheds secret tears over the new and adverse influences thrown about her boy; the lover of the Sabbath sees the sacred day disregarded as though his ancient village were a Western suburb, and all realize that some of the purity, simplicity and uprightness, which perhaps more than compensated for the isolation, has gone forever. But, as before intimated, this is not a disquisition on morality, nor a treatise on the comparative advantages of seclusion over intercourse with the world, but simply a narration of incidents as they were brought to the writer's knowledge.

And so, with the simple observation that the Island has greatly changed in many respects since the day when one corner of it sent out its quarter of a hundred whaleships to distant seas, and another corner assisted to man and officer those vessels or piloted the shipping of a nation over the neighboring shoals, while a third plowed sea and land and reaped a golden harvest from both,—and “Lobsterville” was undreamed of and the summer visitor unknown,—let us end the prologue and call our actors upon the stage.

THE ISLANDERS.

CHAPTER I.

“GENTLEMEN of the jury, hearken to a complaint !”

The clerk, a quiet, sober-visaged youth, had at last, in spite of the difficulties which everywhere seem to attend upon the performance of this ceremony, succeeded in impanelling the jury for the June term of the Superior Court for Dukes County, 187—, and the first case on the criminal docket had just been called.

It was n't a great case. The prisoner at the bar was not charged with killing his man. He had n't broken a bank, nor even robbed a hen roost. He had simply been discovered having in his possession a poor little lobster less than ten and a half inches long, “to wit: of the length of ten and one-fourth inches”; and the Legislature of Massachusetts in its last session had said that any person who should be detected so possessing should suffer the penalty of the law in such case made and provided.

In spite of the insignificance of the case, however, the unpopularity of the law, and the fact that this was the first prosecution under it, had served to draw

together a large attendance of fishermen and other interested parties, who, added to the customary contingent of indifferent spectators, filled the little court room to its utmost capacity.

The complaint having been duly read to the jury, and the prosecuting attorney being about to proceed with the trial, the presiding judge bethought him to inquire of the prisoner — a gray-haired, broken-down looking old man, with all the evidences of extreme poverty about him — if he was represented by counsel.

“No, your Honor,” replied the man, hesitatingly, in low and dejected tones ; “I had a lawyer in the court below, but I have been unable to pay him his fee, and so he has thrown up the case. I have not been able to get anybody in his stead to help me.”

A stranger in the crowd of bystanders, who had been making his way to the front while this colloquy was in progress, now came forward, and gaining the attention of the court announced himself an attorney practising in the courts of the Commonwealth, and offered his services to the prisoner at the bar. That individual, nothing loath, accepted the kindly proffer, and the trial proceeded.

The testimony for the Government was brief but apparently conclusive. The only witness was an agent of a society for the preservation of various kinds of things, who deposed that he entered the defendant's house and found the lobster in question cooking in a kettle on the defendant's stove — adding that when found it was about ready for the table ;

that he measured it by a properly sealed measure, and ascertained that it lacked the legal length by one quarter of an inch.

No cross-examination was attempted, and the government rested.

Then the counsel for defendant took the floor, and was for the first time in full view of the whole assemblage. Those who looked — that is to say, everybody — saw a slender man of seven or eight and twenty, of good height, thin-visaged, beardless, with deep-set eyes of grayish blue, and fair hair slightly waving about a broad white forehead. There was an evident lack of physical robustness, but a suggestion of mental power which perhaps had never been exerted to its full capacity, and of sensitive and imaginative faculties easily aroused.

“May it please the Court, Mr. Foreman and gentlemen,” began the young advocate, and the vibrant, penetrating tones produced an immediate hush; “I do not purpose to offer any testimony in behalf of my client here to-day, but simply to comment briefly on that which has been submitted by the Government, and to point out the utter insufficiency of it to establish this charge. The truth of the facts stated by the witness is admitted, but their adequateness to prove the commission of the alleged offence is denied.

“For observe, gentlemen: the law must be assumed to have for its object the prevention of the *taking* of infant and illegal lobsters. Now, in order the more certainly to check this pernicious practice,

it has been made a penal offence even to have one in possession ; not because the possession in itself is so iniquitous, but because it is evidence either that the present possessor has in his own person been guilty of the crime of taking, or has become accessory to another's offence by furnishing a market for his ill-gotten goods.

“ But this prohibition, gentlemen, may fairly, and must even necessarily, from the point of view just considered, be said to be pronounced against the natural lobster, — the lobster that must not be caught — if not alive, at least raw. Indeed, the cooked lobster may be said to have ceased to be a lobster in the statute sense, just as, by the law of usage, roast veal is no longer calf, and roast pork is hog no more.

“ But the fact that this lobster had been cooked when measured opens up another and fatal ground of objection. Recurring to the proposition that the taking of short lobsters is the thing sought to be abolished, who shall say, with no other information than that derived from this post-mortem, *ex post facto* measurement, what were the dimensions of this lusty crustacean when careering through the chambers of the mighty deep, before it had been submitted to the ordeal of cooking, and had become the shrivelled, shrunken, dwarfed and diminished thing now in evidence ! Everybody knows how a ham becomes reduced in bulk by boiling, and if a ham, why not a lobster ; and if any, how much, and who shall say ?

“ Understand me, gentlemen. If it is clear to you that this terrible old man is actually guilty of this

heinous offence in its true intention, don't spare him. Away with him ! Let him rot in the deepest dungeon, or let his head be displayed on the court-house walls as a warning to the world that this slaughter of the innocents must be stayed. But gentlemen," — and here the bell-like tones of the speaker sank to an impressive whisper, — "if he has only been guilty of the indiscretion of omitting to have his victuals measured before they were cooked, let him have a verdict of acquittal."

The public prosecutor besought the jury to remember that a fish was a fish, dead or alive, cooked or raw. The judge charged as gravely as he might in the face of this extraordinary plea ; and the jury, in five minutes, returned a verdict of "Not guilty."

Meanwhile the mysterious stranger, without waiting for thanks or other recompense, had quietly left the court room, and the criminal docket sped quickly to the end of an otherwise uninteresting calendar.

Robert Lynden, the young man whose appearance upon the scene has just been chronicled, was the only son of a widowed mother, resident in one of the most charming agricultural villages of the State, where, with the exception of four years at college and two seasons of law lectures, supplemented by a year's foreign travel, his whole life had been spent.

Orphaned at an early age by the death of his father, then a young but promising physician, the timely decease of a distant relative soon after left the infant in possession of considerable property, which,

under the wise management of the mother, had sufficed to secure to the boy a liberal education — without the privations which so often accompany its procurement — and since his arrival to man's estate had supported them both in the modest comfort which contented them while looking forward to the larger rewards to result from the young man's practice of his profession. A somewhat delicate constitution, however, joined to a rather dreamy temperament, had thus far operated to deter Robert from any very active efforts in the direction of earning his own living, and a protracted season of more than usual lassitude had sent him to the seaside for the betterment of his condition. Having fixed upon the most desirable location for the summer's sojourn, it was his intention to return for his mother and with her take up his abode there for so much of the year as his health seemed to be benefited by the change.

Like everybody else travelling to the Vineyard, young Lynden had made his first landing at Oak Bluffs, whence, after exploring whatever of interest was afforded by that locality, he had sallied out on little excursions to the neighboring villages, partly with a view to varying the monotony of island life in the early summer, and also to spy out the land with an eye to settling upon a spot where he and his mother might best make their season's home. And it was in one of these wanderings that he chanced in upon the scene with which this story opens, and became — doubtless to his own surprise — one of the principal performers in the little drama there enacted.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK has elapsed since the little episode first narrated, and Lynden and his mother have fixed upon their place of abode, and found comfortable quarters in the pleasant village of Exham. It is a rambling old mansion, the property — with a considerable outlying estate — of a well-to-do couple who have decided to take the Lyndens in as people whom it will be agreeable to “have about,” rather than from a purely commercial point of view; and the new inmates are provided with a suite of roomy apartments in the east wing where they may have as much or as little privacy as they desire.

Christopher and Martha Owen are the names of this worthy couple — he, smooth-shaven, spare, sprightly, the incumbent of various local offices and adviser-at-large to the people of the town; she plump but energetic, quick-witted, good-tempered, and one of the most notable housekeepers in the township. Only two real trials in life will Mrs. Owen admit: The unseasonable “caller” who ought to know that anywhere from five o’clock to half past six is liable to be somebody’s supper time if it is n’t theirs; and the small boy who will persist in ringing the doorbell whenever he leaves a concert programme or advertising circular.

"I can't understand," Mrs. Owen would declare, with an approach to asperity foreign to her usual cheerful declamation, "why people who choose to have their dinner and supper together in the middle of the afternoon, or those who don't have their tea till the middle of the evening, should conclude at once that everybody else follows their example. Folks ought to be exempt from visitors for not only the customary meal time, but a reasonable margin each side for differences." And when she or the maid left some household duty to answer a peremptory ring at the front door, only to discover on the hall floor the announcement of a "Way-Down Sale" of dry goods at the corner shop, she would hurl the offending handbill into the waste-basket and vow she'd go in rags before she'd patronize an establishment that gave people so much needless trouble. But those were pardonable ebullitions, and could not affect the popular estimate of Mrs. Owen as one of the best-hearted and most companionable of women.

There were no children. That is, next to none. A few years before a little stranger had put in an appearance, greatly to the surprise of all concerned, and had since grown into a scrawly, wispy-haired, cross-grained, but healthy little creature of five or six summers. But she was so seldom seen about the house in pleasant weather — so entirely was her time passed in the fields and neighboring woods — that people often forgot to include her in the family enumeration. In fact, even the father, on the infrequent occasions when he chanced to encounter his

child, had a way of regarding her through his spectacles as though seeing her for the first time; while Mrs. Owen, though not wanting in fondness for her unexpected offspring, seemed quite willing that this uncomfortable child of her mature years should be as little noticed as need be.

The location of the house could hardly have been improved. It was situated on a gentle bluff overlooking the harbor, with opposite land off at an angle in the near distance, at another angle the broad reach of the sound, while between a succession of sailing craft, with an occasional steam launch, were constantly plying. The outlook was charming to the last degree, and as Lynden finished his after-breakfast cigar on the morning after his arrival and sauntered lazily down to the pier, he felt that his lines had indeed fallen in pleasant places, and that the summer, whatever of bodily benefit it might bring to him, could not fail in imparting the contentment of mind which springs from congenial surroundings.

Arrived at the pier the first animate object that met his gaze was the ancient fisherman, whose cause he had pleaded so successfully the previous week. The recognition was mutual, and the weather-worn voyager was hastening in curt fashion, but not unkindly tones, to express his gratitude for the timely service and his desire to make some recompense for the same, but was interrupted before he had well commenced.

“Thank me no thanks,” said young Lynden,

laughingly ; “and talk not about compensation for my humble services. It is I who am your debtor, inasmuch as your predicament gave me an opportunity to practice a little at a trade which I have thus far sadly neglected.”

“Since you choose to regard it so,” said the fisherman, “I will not press the matter further, though you must allow me the comfort of at least expressing my appreciation.”

“All right,” said Lynden ; “let us compromise on that. And now let me ask where you are bound this delightful day.”

“Bluefishing, if the wind holds, and if you like I’ll be glad to have you go along.”

“With all my heart,” says Lynden, “if you will wait for me to change some of my garb” ; and without staying for an answer was back to his boarding place, whence he soon reappeared suitably clad, and with luncheon and other requisites for the cruise.

All other necessary preparations having already been made, the boat was forthwith detached from her moorings, and under the influence of a light west wind, was soon carrying passenger and crew into the open sound.

No one who cannot recall a similar excursion made for the first time can appreciate Lynden’s sensations as the boat glided on over the watery way. The air was almost intoxicating in its clearness. The surface of the harbor sparkled under the sun and rippled under the freshening breeze, and the swelling sail seemed instinct with life. Passing

boats sent their "hail ho!" across the intervening water. Here and there groups of wild fowl rested tranquilly on the bosom of the sound, — or dived below, or skimmed away on low-flying wing. Later a train of porpoises went bounding and plunging along on their jocund journey, while farther away the never-ending procession of eastern-bound coasters pursued their stately course down over the shoals. To a person of Lynden's imaginative temperament all these sights and sounds made up an entertainment which held him with an indescribable fascination; and so oblivious had he become to lapse of time or distance travelled, that, before he had come to realize that the voyage was well begun, they had traversed a considerable section of the sound, rounded Cape Pogue, and were fairly upon the fishing ground.

Having despatched their luncheon, the drails were put out, the boat still winging her way under the freshening breeze, and in less time than it takes to tell it both fishermen were "fast." For an hour thereafter the fun, as the comedy posters announce, was "fast and furious," and both men had their hands full with the ever-tightening lines, — the amateur imitating the professional to the best of his ability, and finding himself at the end of the hour a good deal used up, but with about a third of the whole catch credited to himself.

Having had enough sport by this time for a starter, Lynden spent the next half hour in a further investigation of the lunch-basket, and by the

end of the second hour the skipper announced the fishing over for that tide, and put about for home.

During the sail out Lynden had been so entirely possessed with a sense of the harmonies of nature, and a feeling of bodily comfort and contentment, that he had been little disposed to conversation ; and while the fishing was on there was little opportunity for that diversion. Now, however, the return home promised to be not quite so rapid as the outward trip, and a greater familiarity with his situation moved the young man to turn to his elderly companion for a little entertainment from that quarter.

To his surprise, however, his conversational overtures met with little encouragement from the older man. Such answers as common civility compelled him to vouchsafe were couched in terms which indicated that he had sufficient command of language to talk easily, and even gracefully ; but there was an evident reluctance to be drawn out which the younger man found it impossible to overcome.

“This is a fine boat, Capt. ——”

“Austin,” supplied the skipper. “Yes.”

“I suppose you take considerable pride in her sailing qualities?”

“I should if she was mine.”

“Then you are not her owner?”

“No.”

“Is fishing quite profitable here, taking the year 'round?”

“No.”

“Do you like the life?”

"Yes."

"But it's a toilsome one, is n't it, full of hardship and exposure, and you say attended with little profit?"

"Yes."

"They why do you follow it?" persisted Robert.

"In the first place," replied the fisherman, reluctantly, "because it's all I'm fit for now, and in the next place because it takes me away from everything and everybody. I prefer solitude to the society of my own kind — no offence, young man."

"No, I can't take any, as you invited me along. And, by the way, with the unsocial disposition to which you have just confessed, how did you come to do that?"

"I could hardly avoid extending you that much civility," said the old man, slowly; "and besides — but no matter for the rest, I think that will do." And shifting uneasily around, as though disturbed by the cross examination to which he had been subjected, he relapsed into the brown study which seemed to be his habitual condition, with the evident intention of discouraging any further attempts at conversation.

For the remainder of the way nothing passed between the two men until their arrival at the landing, when, having in vain pressed upon Capt. Austin the usual testimonial for that kind of an excursion, and having selected a single handsome fish as a trophy of the day's exploits, Robert reached the house in ample time for supper, and with an appetite to which he had long been a stranger.

CHAPTER III.

THE following day Robert found himself too stiff and sore from the unwonted exertions incident to his cruise to care for an immediate repetition of the experience, and so spent the greater part of the day on the shady veranda, reading, watching the passing boats, building castles in Spain and speculating on what the summer might have in store for him.

Not that he expected anything remarkable to come to him in this out of the way place, where even the summer visitor had n't penetrated in very considerable numbers; but after all it is the unexpected that generally happens, as has many times been said, and to the youthful mind there is ever present the possibility of some extraordinary experience which maturer life would hardly contemplate.

Contrary to all precedent, however, "falling in love" was not one of the possibilities that came within the range of his meditations. Young as he was, he had already had one love episode which had left him saddened, as he believed, forever, although the first bitterness of his grief had long since yielded to the ameliorating touch of time. He had hardly more than come of age, and was in attendance upon the course of law lectures with which he had supplemented his college career, when he met the fair

young girl who seemed to him the embodiment of all womanly graces, and in due time won from her lips the blushing avowal that life could hold no greater happiness for her than to be his wife. But, alas! hardly had the young lover become accustomed to the contemplation of his own felicity, when death interposed, and Marian Somers went out of his life forever.

This happened more than three years before the time of the opening of this story, and, while the first keenness of his grief had now become dulled, there were moments when his mind recurred with all its former sadness to the memory of the fair young girl whom he had held in his arms, and whose love had warmed his heart, and he felt anew the crushing sense of irretrievable loss.

But he would not allow himself to dwell upon it unreasonably, and had long since discovered that to a man fairly healthy, and with a tolerable store of wordly goods, life with all its disappointments contains still sufficient enjoyment to make it well worth the living.

Robert had laid aside his book at last, and had fallen into a reverie covering some of the lines of thought suggested above, when suddenly a faint cry called his attention to the water front, and immediately his gaze was riveted on a small object evidently struggling in the water a few rods from the shore. Again the cry, and by this time he was down to the nearest pier, and jumped into and was casting off the boat first at hand. A few vigorous strokes of the

oar (learned at Harvard) brought him to the object's side as it rose for the second time, disclosing a fair-haired little boy, apparently about five years old, entirely naked, and now utterly exhausted from his frantic endeavors to save himself from drowning.

Drawing the little fellow into the boat and getting back to the landing without loss of time, Robert took the little half-dead castaway in his arms and ran for the house, where some simple restoratives, under Mrs. Owen's skilful application, soon brought the child around, anxious to get out of the bed to which he had been committed.

"Now my little man," said Robert, encouragingly, "how came you in such a fix as I found you in?"

"I went in swimming. Sister likes me to if I only go in as much as that," indicating a depth of about half his little length; "but I s'pose I went a little deeper this time. I stood up all right, but when I went to swim the water carried me way off, and it frightened me and I cried. And then you came"—this last with a grateful glance at his deliverer.

"Well, my little chap, all I can say is you're lucky I was mooning my time away on that stoop instead of being off on some excursion, as a better man would doubtless have been. Even idleness has its rewards sometimes. But where are your clothes?"

"I guess they're on the shore," said the boy, brightly, "near some seaweed. There's only trowsiz and shirt. I did n't wear any hat."

So back to the shore went Robert, and paced up and down the pebbly strand without discovering the scant but necessary raiment, until chancing to direct his gaze to a point some distance along the beach, he descried the missing apparel, caught by the now rising tide, and borne along by the coastwise current.

To rescue the articles from the shallow water was an easy matter, but they were, of course, wet through, and Robert meditated as he returned to the house on how he should array the little foundling for his homeward journey.

"What's your name, bub?" he inquired, as he again entered the house with his moist bundle.

"Jimmie," replied the child as he ruefully eyed the wet garments.

"Jimmie what?"

"Jimmie Austin."

"And where do you live?"

"Only a little way from here," said the boy, pointing toward the village and a little back from the shore.

"Well," said Robert, "there seems to be no way of getting you home decently but for me to wrap you in this blanket and carry you there."

And so, suiting the action to the word, the child not demurring, the young man wound a blanket around the little form, and taking him in his arms marched off in the direction indicated by a small brown finger.

Arrived at the house, the door was opened at

their knock by a young girl, who started back in dismay as she beheld the bundle which Robert carried, but quickly recovered as she perceived that the object so wrapped and enveloped was alive and unharmed.

"Where did you find him and how happens it that he comes in this plight?" said the girl, after she had invited Lynden to be seated and had seen that the boy was in a fair way to get into some dry clothes.

"I fished him out of the water," said Robert, smiling, "just as his little strength was about giving out. It was n't deep, but then you know it does n't take much water to drown a chicken of that size. Permit me, by the way, to introduce myself, — Robert Lynden, at your service."

The girl's face flushed as she heard the name, and she turned to her visitor with renewed interest.

"Then this is the second time you have come to our aid. My father has told me of the kind service you rendered him in the unfortunate predicament in which he was placed a few days ago, and now we find ourselves again your debtor."

"Don't mention it, please," said Lynden, indifferently. "I am only too happy to have been of use. Fortune," with a look that met no encouragement in the frank gaze of the girl, "has favored me."

A somewhat awkward pause ensuing, the girl arose and busied herself unfolding the child's wet garments, and emptying the pockets of the little trowsers — disclosing a small wad of rounded and

carefully preserved gum, which she regarded with a quizzical sidelong glance at Robert, — a fish line, a broken-bladed pen-knife, an Indian arrow-head, a sinker, and a couple of coppers; all of which, except the gum, she placed where the boy could find them.

This little by-play gave Lynden an opportunity to look about him and observe the scrupulous neatness but poverty-stricken appearance of the apartment, evidently the "living room" of the family; the absence of everything but indispensable articles of furniture, and the almost equally comfortless aspect of the "best room" which he could see through the open door.

But the girl herself claimed his chief attention, and with reason. The rich, full tones of the most musical voice he seemed ever to have heard had impressed him with the first words that fell from her lips; and now he perceived that the girl's whole physical personality was entirely in keeping with her wonderful voice. That is, he perceived it generally. He made no inventory of her attractions at the time, and after he had gone, the young man was surprised to find that he couldn't recall any one particular in which she surpassed other beautiful women of his acquaintance; and that a vague sense of sombre eyes and golden-brown hair, and graceful but dignified movement, was all that he could carry away as his recollection of Elinor Austin. But all the same, he knew that she had impressed him differently from any woman whom he had ever met.

Vigorous health was evident in every movement, and unconsciousness of her own charms appeared in every action.

Meanwhile little Jim had reappeared, clad in dry but much and carefully darned clothing, and hastily appropriating his little treasures — with a hurried glance for something that he evidently missed — was out and away.

Finding no excuse for lingering longer, Lynden now arose to take leave of his hostess, who, recurring to his rescue of the child, thanked him again for the service he had rendered them.

“Father would never have got over it if anything had happened to the child. He is the very apple of his eye,” she went on, in even tones, but with a slight flush and with the least suspicion of defiance in her voice, as Lynden afterward remembered. “All his life seems bound up in him; and of course he is very dear to me as well.” She then added, after a brief hesitation, “Father objects to my asking people here, and it is seldom that I care to myself. Still, we must not appear unappreciative of the kindness you have shown us, and I am sure I may venture to say that we shall be glad to see you whenever you may be pleased to call.”

“I cannot assent to the exorbitant estimate you place on these trifles,” replied Lynden, seriously; “but I will gladly avail myself of your invitation, and will endeavor at the same time not to presume upon your good nature, or your father’s patience, by inflicting myself too often upon your hospitality.”

And so saying the young man bowed himself out of the door and retraced his steps slowly to his boarding place, pondering on the circumstances which had twice thrown him in the way of these people, and wondering if there was in the coincidence any augury of interest to him.

CHAPTER IV.

LYNDEN was up betimes the following morning, determined to make an early start for the fishing grounds if he could find a boatman at liberty to take him. A hasty but hearty breakfast despatched, he was down to the pier only in time to see his friend Austin's boat disappearing in the distance. Another fisherman, however, was just getting under way, and assenting readily to the proposition that he take a "mate," Robert was soon on board and the trim little craft pointed for the open water.

The young man soon discovered that in his new skipper he had a companion about as nearly the opposite of Capt. Austin as could well be imagined. "Capt." Durgin, whose proud boast it was that he "eat more tobacker than any other six men in the place," could no more have made a trip to or from the fishing ground with his mouth shut than Capt. Austin could have beguiled the time spinning yarns or retailing gossip. The former was as open as the latter was shut, and he kept up a running fire of comment and communication, delivered with so much evident enjoyment and in such excellent spirit that Robert could not but be amused in spite of himself. The "captain" — he got his title by a sort of brevet — was not only an expert fisherman, but had

been an accomplished pilot, and between the two vocations the reminiscences of his active life were marvellous in the extreme.

From the narration of his own exploits the skipper naturally enough got around finally to the consideration of his brethren in the craft, when Robert inquired what he knew of his friend Capt. Austin.

"Austin?" exclaimed the other. "I don't know anything about him, and I don't want to. Crusty old duffer!"

"Is n't he popular?"

"I don't know what he is with the other fellows, but he ain't popular with me, and don't you forget it."

"Ever injured you?"

"No; and I ain't the man to squeal if he had. It ain't that. I've no use for him. He's such an unsociable cuss that there's no living with him. When he first turned up here about five years ago I undertook to be civil with him and kind of make him feel at home; but the way he met me, sir, when I asked him a few questions about his family, was a caution. Hanged if I can't see him glare now."

"Then he is n't a native of the place," said Robert, with evident interest.

"No," said the skipper, as he fixed his teeth in a huge slab of navy plug, and tore off about a quarter of it; "he came here, as I said before, about five years ago, with one gal about grown up and a young wife and baby, and bought the shanty where he lives now, with the few sticks of furniture there was in it,

and set up housekeepin'. He seemed to have a little money left after payin' for his house, as near's we could find out by inquiren' at the stores 'nd round, but the sickness and death of his wife left him about strapped, and since then I guess it's been pretty nigh the wind with him all the time. But he 'nd his gal's so damn stuck up that nobody seems to care much whether they sink or swim."

"Do you know anything of his history before he came here?"

"Not much," said the fisherman, regretfully. "None of us has been able to get anything out of him. But he did tell the man that owns his boat that he had been a seafarin' man all his life, and knew all about sailin' craft, big and little."

By this time they were on the fishing ground, and were soon having such sport as only big schools of hungry bluefish can furnish to the fisher. Hardly would the drails get well out before they would be seized, and presently a fish would shoot into the air as he felt the line drawing on him, and would then commence making his reluctant but inevitable progress toward the boat. And so on they came for two good hours—now skimming along the surface, now seeking deliverance by a plunge below—until the tide had turned, and a hundred and fifty five-pounders lay in the bottom of the staunch little craft.

This day it happened that almost the entire force of the east side of the island fished on the same tide, and so, with the slacking of the water, the whole

fleet, with one accord, ran down the Chappaquiddic shore and swept around the Cape, nearly a hundred strong, laying their course thence for Exham, Wexham and Oak Bluffs. With all sail set, and the wind abeam, they presented a most inspiring spectacle, and Robert could not repress a feeling of exhilaration as he found himself a part of this swift-flying procession.

Capt. Durgin had it all his own way, conversationally, going home, the labor of the day, his interest in the impromptu race, and the information he had received on the outward passage, all disposing his "mate" to non-interference with the skipper's monologue. Only once he ventured, in a rash way, to suggest to the captain a nautical manœuvre by which an approaching boat might be distanced.

"Couldn't you," said Robert, "head her a little closer by bringing the boom over — *so?*"

"Ya-as," said Durgin; "I did that with the first boat I ever owned."

"And —?" incautiously queried Robert.

"Wa-al," deliberately, while his twinkling eye took in the broad sound and the whole range of islands, from Naushon to Penekese, "she upsot."

CHAPTER V.

As has already been intimated, the village of Exham, at the date of the occurrences here narrated, differed in its society and local institutions probably not very much from other localities similarly situated and of equal age. It had a bank and factory, a newspaper and town hall, a dozen stores where six would have sufficed, and its three ministers where there should have been one. It had a leading citizen and his humble followers, besides its sewing-circles, gossiping women, literary club, and Society of Christian Endeavor.

All these institutions and persons flourished here as elsewhere, and all without doubt fulfilled their responsible missions as satisfactorily here as anywhere in the world. The bank transacted business peculiar to its kind, and its regular dividend of six per cent was pointed to with pride by the natives as evidence of the substantial character of their ancient burg. The factory, by a career of uniform prosperity, had proved conclusively that manufacturing could be as profitably conducted on an island as on "dry land." The newspaper gave currency to local events that might otherwise have slumbered in oblivion, and the gossips—in and out of the sewing-circles—cheerfully made good any omissions of

which the newspaper might have been guilty. The stores were like other stores, and each guaranteed to furnish a better article at a lower rate than any other similar establishment in the town. The ministers preached to one third congregation and two thirds empty seats; lamented the lack of spiritual life in their respective charges; assented with apparent alacrity to the incursions of occasional evangelists, and furnished as good sermons as could reasonably be expected for "\$700 and a donation." When the annual election came around the leading citizen prepared his "slate," which he kindly permitted the people to ratify. The literary people tackled Shakespeare and gave "entertainments," here as on the continent, and the Society of Christian Endeavor laid out for itself broad and comprehensive programmes of social and spiritual reform, such as only youthful and chiefly feminine associations have the nerve to undertake.

From all of which it will at once be seen that the village of Exham was quite like other small communities, and had no particular reason for thanking God that it was not as other villages are.

There was one local practice, however, which, though not unknown in other regions, is perhaps unusual enough to warrant remark, and that was the welcoming a new pastor with a public reception and address. Such an event was announced a few days after Lynden's fishing excursion with Capt. Durgin, the occasion being the arrival of the Rev. George Sewell, young and unmarried. A general

invitation was extended to all members of the society in interest, and a special request was made to such persons of the same faith as might be sojourning in the place and should become known to the committee of arrangements. Robert and his mother, who, through the instrumentality of the Owens, had become somewhat acquainted with the good people of the town, were among the latter—himself accepting, while Mrs. Lynden, who had, or professed to have, a constitutional dislike for miscellaneous assemblages, declined.

By nine o'clock the parlors of one of the staunchest pillars of the church were filled with members and invited friends, and the young parson had taken his position at a point of vantage, where arriving guests were led up to him, and duly presented by the lady of the house who stood at his elbow. If the young priest perceived that an unusual proportion of the advancing host were young women, or that their words of greeting were more cordial, and the pressure of the hand more lingering than the perfunctory salutations usual to such occasions, he made no sign, but regarded the young creatures brought up for his inspection with smiling gravity, and distributed his bows and other acknowledgments with unvarying impartiality.

We say he made no sign, but perhaps that was not strictly the case. Once, when a stylish but rather "fresh" young person was going through her paces, dimpling as she approached, and looking up from her half-lowered lids with shy, coy glances,

unconscious that the hope that filled her fluttering heart was patent to all observers, the young parson caught Lynden's eye fixed upon him in grave amusement, and barely escaped going to pieces on the spot. A slight twitching of the muscles about the mouth, however, which the young damsel was far too preoccupied to perceive, was all that appeared.

Everybody having been given a chance at the minister, a little informal interval ensued, utilized by the young ladies in showing themselves off to the best advantage — the musical ones at the piano, the domestic ones in the preparation of the coming "treat," while the pretty-and-nothing-else ones contented themselves with hovering about the centre of attraction, grouping picturesquely here and there, or posing gracefully as opportunity offered.

Presently the time arrived for the address of welcome and the company had begun to dispose themselves for most conveniently enjoying it, when suddenly symptoms of trouble appeared. A number of the sisters were perceived to be in earnest and somewhat excited conference, and after a season of mild contention bore down upon Lynden, who was for the moment standing a little apart from the others, and forced him into a corner.

Then they unfolded to him the burden of their woe. They had expected the orator of the evening, a bright young native, to arrive from New Bedford on the evening boat; but now a belated message had just come to hand saying that he was unavoidably detained and they must get along without him.

"Now, Mr. Lynden," said the leader, a gay young widow, "if you don't help us we're in the boat. There's a plenty here that can kill whales, and catch bluefish, and build houses, and do lots of other useful things, but not a mother's son of them that can make a speech."

"Yes, do help us," chimed in her first lieutenant, a young lady of semi-literary turn. "Just think of it. It will be like the play of Hamlet with — perhaps not Hamlet, but at least as much as the ghost left out."

"You'll have to do it, Mr. Lynden," declared the hostess, now coming up. "I've canvassed the whole company, and the men are horror stricken at the bare idea."

"But consider, ladies," protested Robert, at the first break in the torrent of imploration; "I haven't given the first thought to the matter, and it is entirely out of my ordinary line of disquisition. I should make a mess of it."

"No fear of that," exclaimed the hostess. "We've heard of your impromptu performance in the court room, and we know what you're equal to."

"Yes," said the secretary; "everybody was talking about it for a week."

"Help, or we perish!" sang the widow.

"Yes; do!" all in concert.

Thus adjured Robert was fain to yield to the voice of supplication, though protesting that it was about the hardest place he had been put in yet; and after a minute's swift meditation approached the spot where the minister was standing.

Encouraged by the expression of sympathy resting upon the features of his victim, slightly modified by a gleam of quiet amusement lurking in his eye — and with a last glance of comical distress at the assembled company, Lynden began : —

“ DEAR PASTOR AND FRIEND : I find myself in an unusual and certainly unexpected position to-night, called upon, as I have been, to voice to you the welcome and good wishes of all these assembled friends. They who have imposed upon me this task have taken little thought, I am afraid, as to the probable manner of its execution, but like good committee women have been chiefly moved by a praiseworthy ambition to have no part of their programme miscarry. Let us, then, as well-intentioned speaker and lenient listener, stay each other through the ordeal thus commenced, while I promise, for my part, to remember that in the matter of speech making — unless it be a very superior article — ‘ man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long.’

“ Although, my dear brother, this is not a church council, and these remarks are not intended for a charge to the pastor, nevertheless — and in view especially of the fact that an address of welcome, pure and simple, has already been extended by nearly every person present — a few words of suggestion to you upon the threshold of your pastoral connection with this people may not be out of place.

“ And, to begin, I am informed that there are about a hundred members upon the rolls of this church, representing probably fifty families. Assuming that every well-regulated household takes both its politics and its theology from the head of the house, and that there are only as many differing sub-beliefs as there are families, it follows at once that, throwing out a fortnight for vacation, your Reverence will be able to deliver a discourse adapted to the views of some one pair of parishioners for every Sunday in the year. Nothing could be simpler or more practical, and the first year of

your pastorate may well be employed in ascertaining the various shades of belief of your fifty families.

“Again, you will find it desirable in a community like this to cultivate habits of sociability, and of easy and familiar intercourse with the members of your charge; and I speak especially now of your male parishioners. To that end you will find it important to drop in occasionally at the grocery lyceum, the clothier’s sanctum, some of the places where the public business is transacted, and to be at the post-office a little ahead of the opening of the mail. I would not advise too much of this, lest, peradventure, the public sense be outraged, and the people wag their heads and say, ‘Behold this loafer!’ But it is equally important not to err on the other side, lest they say, ‘Behold this exclusive and holier-than-thou person, who holdeth himself aloof.’ I may add in passing, that the bicycle, as an item of the ministerial outfit, may be regarded as at best of doubtful utility.

“In your intercourse with the sisters, likewise, there will be an opportunity for the exercise of that wise discretion which should be a part of the clerical equipment. The younger sisters will want advice and encouragement. See that they have plenty of the former, and the latter at proper times, and with due regard to the connection and occasion. They will want sympathy in their yearnings after the unattainable, and due direction in their heart’s desires. I but suggest the rocks and shoals over which you must be your own pilot in these uncertain waters, and gladly hasten to consider your relations to the maturer members of your feminine charge.

“And here I may say that, with the wives and mothers in Israel, your chief concern will be as to the manner of your pastoral visitations, and how much and how little you will break bread at their table. With some, the greatest compliment you can pay them will be a habit of ‘dropping in,’ in season and out of season, and, if the board happens to be spread, of addressing yourself thereto as a member of the family. There are others who will want six weeks’ notice of

your coming. To discover in which of these classes your housewife parishioners should be catalogued, you should address yourself with diligence, and the solution of the problem may well receive your careful attention for at least the first year of your pastorate.

“Other suggestions might properly enough be offered here, but I am already too long. Let me say in conclusion that we are all conscious of the solemnity of the relation into which you and we have now entered. Some of us you may bury; some of us you may join in marriage; others of us you may unite with the church; with all of us you will sustain more or less intimate relations. Out of this connection now so auspiciously entered upon, to the evident satisfaction of this whole society, let us hope there may result nothing but good to the church and community, and honor to Him in whose name you are come.”

The young clergyman was equal to the emergency. Although he had anticipated the usual cut-and-dried address, characteristic of such occasions, he had had time to throw overboard some of the heavy matter with which he had come loaded, and to attune his thoughts to the lighter lay suggested by Lynden's remarkable “charge.” He accepted the suggestions submitted by the spokesman of the society, and promised to give them his careful, if not prayerful consideration. He besought the kind indulgence of his parishioners, while endeavoring to adjust himself to their wishes in the various relations indicated by his good brother, and begged that they would not be backward in coming to his rescue whenever they saw him in danger of transgressing any of the rules laid down for his direction. And then, coming down to the spirit manifested in the closing sentences of

Lynden's address, he said a few earnest words of appreciation of the compliment paid him and of hopefulness for the success of his pastorate, and so brought the little ceremonial to an appropriate close.

The successful issue of what at one time promised to be a lamentable failure left the company in high good humor, and the committee could hardly find words to express their delight. They almost devoured Robert in their frantic efforts to make known their gratitude, and that young gentleman was only too happy when the signal for refreshments gave a new direction to the thoughts and energies of his admirers. This also came to an end at last, and after a little more music and an innocuous game or two the party broke up, and old and young, the girls as they assumed their wraps, sending many a wistful glance to where the two heroes of the evening stood, dispersed to their several abodes.

Robert remained a while for a little quiet conversation with his entertainers and Mr. Sewell, and then took his leave, promising himself no little pleasure from the acquaintance with the young clergyman, in so novel a manner begun.

As he stepped out on to the street a figure flitted past him which struck him as being familiar, while at the same time a stream of light from a window disclosed the face of the fisherman's daughter.

CHAPTER VI.

"MISS AUSTIN!"

The figure stopped, hesitated, and then turned.

"Forgive me for stopping you with so little ceremony," said Robert; "but as the hour is so late, and the way so dark, I thought you might be glad of an escort home. Besides," he continued, as she silently accepted his arm, "I've made so many vain attempts to see you since my first appearance with Jimmie, that I couldn't bring myself to forego this opportunity."

"I am sorry," said the girl, nervously, evidently disturbed out of the composure of manner which had so impressed him in their first interview. "I would have been glad to see you, but — I had miscalculated my father's feeling. He was not angry with me, and his gratitude for your timely aid in rescuing the child was not less than I had assured you it would be. But there was such an expression of distress on his countenance when I told him you were likely to call again that I hastened to assure him that it should not occur oftener than need be. You can not know, Mr. Lynden," continued the girl, "why he so dreads my forming acquaintances, and I can hardly well enlighten you."

Robert made no reply to this. In truth he hardly

heard her. He was too busy trying to analyze his own feelings as he felt this sensitive — though apparently lowly — creature's hand on his arm and listened again to her rich voice, to follow very closely what she was saying.

He was only conscious that in some way he had been prevented from visiting her, and that she was now endeavoring to offer some explanation of it. And from that moment the desire to know her more intimately took full possession of his soul.

"If I had supposed it was likely to subject you to any embarrassment," he said gently, "I should n't have attempted to call. And if you say now that it will be distasteful to you I'll seek opportunity no further."

"No, no !" replied the girl, quickly, and with almost a suspicion of pain in her voice ; "I cannot so belie my own feelings as to say that ; and besides, the black ingratitude of it is more than I can bear. If I could explain you would understand. Though I can't believe that the explanation would be important" —

"You mistake me very much," interrupted Lynden, earnestly, "if you think it a matter of no importance to me ; and I hope it may not be entirely without interest to you. I have been impressed by the insistence with which circumstances seem to have conspired to bring us together, and can only feel that fate never would have taken so much trouble to make us acquainted only to consent that immediately we should go our ways like any other two who had met by chance."

"And yet," said Miss Austin, "it would perhaps be better so. My father's strong disinclination to my forming intimacies must always stand between them and me. And how can friendships be blessed that are cultivated in the face of a parent's dissent?"

"And yet, does n't it strike you as a little hard that a young woman like you should be condemned to live the life of a recluse merely to humor an old man's whim?"

"Hush!" cried the girl reprovingly; "I can't have even you speak in that way of my father. You little know how he has suffered, nor how dearly I love him. Yes," she continued; "it is a quiet life, but I have grown not to mind it, or to expect anything better. If only my father is saved any new worries, and Jimmie is fed and clothed, I am content."

"But do you never long for anything different—for the advantages which you must forego in this out-of-the-way place, and for the social pleasures from which even here you seem to be debarred?"

"Sometimes, but not to dwell upon it. And then you must remember that since I have been old enough to think about it it has been as you see. I miss nothing that I have been accustomed to since a child."

"Would you mind telling me something about yourself—your history?" said Robert, hesitatingly. "Believe me, it is from no idle curiosity that I speak, but for the interest that I feel in your situation, and the honest desire that I have to do something to better it."

For a moment there was no reply.

“There is almost nothing to tell. We came here from New York a few years ago. Business reverses had previously overtaken my father, followed by fits of despondency and consequent ill health, and he finally decided to realize what little he could from the remnant of property remaining to him, and come to this island. In the delicate state of her health the journey was too much for Jimmie’s mother, — Jimmie is not my full brother, my own mother died before I can remember, — and her death, soon after we reached this place, left my father more depressed than ever. But here we have been ever since, very much as you see us, and here doubtless we shall remain, — at least, as long as my father lives.”

By the time Miss Austin had finished this brief recital they had reached the fisherman’s dwelling, through the uncovered window of which the old man could be seen sitting at a table, his head resting on his hand, and his whole attitude indicative of the deepest dejection.

The sight seemed to arouse in the girl a sense of neglected duty, or trust betrayed; and suddenly dropping her companion’s arm, and hardly waiting to hear his acknowledgment of her confidence, she disappeared in the house.

CHAPTER VII.

CAPT. AUSTIN looked up as his daughter entered, his countenance marked not so much with displeasure as with a deepening of the depression that never left it.

"You are late, my child."

"Yes, father; Mrs. Harding kept me until she was satisfied that the work was done according to direction, and that took some time. She is liberal and just, but very particular that her instructions shall be carried out."

"Was there no other reason for your tardiness?"

"Yes, father; I was coming to that. As I came by Mr. Crocker's on my return, I met Mr. Lynden just leaving the reception, and I could not without rudeness decline his escort, particularly as our ways lay so nearly in the same direction. And, after all, father, what was the harm—except that we must come more slowly than if I had been alone, and so, perhaps, made you anxious?"

"Aye, child, I was anxious; and it seems to me there's never a moment that I am otherwise."

"But, father," said the girl slowly, "do you never think what this excessive solicitude concerning me indicates? Has it never occurred to you that it betokens a lack of confidence that is not very flattering to me?"

“No, Elinor,” said the old man, more gently than was his wont ; “I have never thought of it in that light, and it does n’t seem to me necessary that you should think of it so. But I know how readily a lonely woman’s heart often responds to new and congenial influences, even though her conduct is not a whit governed thereby, and I dread the time when your own heart may turn unconsciously to one who will not care for its keeping.”

“But, father,” returned the daughter, flushing slightly ; “why are you so certain that I am not likely to be sought with earnestness of purpose as well as other young women?”

“Because, my child, of our situation and history. Retired and unobtrusive as we are, I know we are looked at askance by those we meet, and that this feeling of suspicion, together with our poverty, will always keep you beyond the range of any sincere suitor whose pretensions would be considered by you. And even were a stranger to come, and ask no questions, you know that your own sense of honor would not permit you to accept his addresses without first acquainting him with the truth.”

Elinor Austin was silent for a few moments. She was wondering at first how far her father had spoken his whole heart when he had said that his only fear was that her affections might be bestowed where they were not honestly asked for, and next, whether or not his own bitter experience had cheapened his estimate of the virtue of all women. And then, turning for a moment’s self-introspection, and trying

to sound the depths of her own nature, she felt the proud consciousness that however hotly the currents of love might throb through her being, there was no conceivable exigency in life in which she would not prove full mistress of herself.

And then she said :—

“It seems to me, father, that from whatever point of view considered, your solicitude is uncalled for, and you are only disturbing yourself without occasion. I have no desire to go out of my way to form acquaintances, but it does n't seem as though we could always go on keeping aloof from everybody.”

“Perhaps not,” said the fisherman, doubtingly. “But it seems as though there was safety in no other course.” Then, after a moment's silence, — “Did Lynden say anything about having called, or calling again?”

“He said he had endeavored to call, but no one ever appeared to be at home. And I finally had to tell him frankly that I knew his coming — anybody's coming — would be so distasteful to you that I had purposely kept out of the way.”

“Which I suppose he thinks a poor return for his kindness to us?”

“He did n't say so, but, on the contrary, declared with evident sincerity that if we really desired it he would make no further attempt to continue the acquaintance. But that I could hardly bring myself to say, and could only suggest that we think no more about it then, and so we left it.”

“I cannot bear to have a gentleman — and he cer-

tainly is one — think me such a boor as well as ingrate,” exclaimed the captain, beside himself as to what course to pursue ; “and perhaps I am only needlessly borrowing trouble. I will at any rate not restrain you by any instructions in the matter, trusting to circumstances and your own good sense to carry you through.”

And, having kissed his daughter good night, a weakness in which he now-a-days seldom indulged, Capt. Austin took a lamp and strode moodily off to bed. And Elinor in turn, after securing the doors as was her practice, went to her own room, where after a glance at Jimmie sleeping in his crib, and having imprinted a warm kiss upon the childish lips, she sought the repose which her young but tired body so much needed.

CHAPTER VIII.

ELINOR retired to rest, but not to sleep. Over and over she lived again the brief hour of her walk through the evening shades with Robert Lynden; heard again the quiet, earnest tones of his musical voice; yielded again to the sweet influence which pervaded her as she felt the tenderness of his manner and the respectful deference which characterized his whole behavior towards her. Not that she felt herself to be what is generally termed "in love" with this almost utter stranger, but there came to her thoughts and emotions which had been unknown, and a sense of willing weakness to which the self-reliant girl had ever been a stranger. As she recalled the singular solicitude manifested by her father in respect of this young man, she hid her burning face in her pillow, realizing at the same time how foolish were his fears and how utterly groundless his deep concern. And so in alternations of self-questioning and abandonment to gentler currents of thought, hour after hour passed away, until at last she fell into a troubled sleep, to dream of her father, and Robert, and little Jim, all thrown together in a chaos of inter-relations.

With the morning she was up betimes and busy at her accustomed duties, with an unaccustomed

lightness of heart, and a new zest in living, for which she did not ask herself the reason. Her father, self-absorbed and depressed as always, noted nothing unusual in her demeanor, and ate his breakfast and strode away with his lunch-pail without a sign. But Jimmie opened his eyes in astonishment at an unexpected hug bestowed upon him by his usually undemonstrative sister, and when, as he was about starting off to his play, she drew him to her and pressed a warm kiss on either cheek, he could not refrain from expressing his childish wonder.

"Why, sister, what makes you love me so this morning?"

"Don't I always love you, Jimmie?"

"Yes; but you seem different to-day, and your cheeks are so red, and your eyes shine."

"I don't believe I can explain it to you, child. Indeed, I doubt if I know myself. If I ever find out for certain I will tell you." And with this answer the boy had to be content, and went his way out into the glad sunshine.

All the morning, Elinor went singing about her work—she whose lips had seemed to be hermetically sealed except when occasion demanded that they open—and when along toward noon a messenger arrived from the village with a package of books and papers, the glad light that illumined her countenance indicated that she had divined the sender even before reading the brief note that accompanied the gift.

It was only a line, to say that while his personal presence might not be desirable (for the reasons she

had given), he trusted that these might serve in some small measure to relieve the monotony of her life. He also added that if not rebuffed in this he would, perhaps, venture to repeat the performance as often as it was likely to prove acceptable to her.

Like any other woman, Elinor could but be pleased with this little attention; and the delicate way in which it was proffered could not, if Robert had so intended it, have been better chosen to overcome the girl's pride and break down the barrier of reserve which she had felt it incumbent upon her to rear between them.

It was a miscellaneous lot of literature that Elinor found on opening the bundle — evidently the collection of one not quite certain of his ground, and not altogether clear as to what would be likely to find favor with the object of its bestowal. Shrewdly guessing, however, that the girl's opportunities for mental culture had been somewhat limited in her later years, though little suspecting how utter had been her isolation from all means of self-improvement, Robert had for the most part carefully avoided such matter as he feared might only weary, and possibly inspire an aversion to reading, and had as a result got together an assortment of fact, fiction and poetry — bright, clear, and wholesome, but in the main calculated to entertain rather than instruct.

A stolen glance at her treasures that night helped Elinor to peaceful slumber, and she fell asleep with happy thoughts, in spite of one line that had caught her eye, and recurred to her mind again and again :

“Had they never met so kindly.”

CHAPTER IX.

WEEKS slipped away, with little of incident to vary the monotony of island life. The villages of Exham and Wexham maintained their well-earned reputation for tranquillity and repose, and even at the Bluffs, where were congregated the great body of summer sojourners, the days were very much alike. There was the almost unvarying round of reading, smoking, and flirting on the shady verandas, the daily drives to Katama, Tashmoo, or Lagoon Heights, the boating, bathing, and fishing—and last, but far from least, the evening assemblage at the landing to witness the arrival of the steamers. All these, enjoyable enough as experiences, furnish little entertainment in the recital, and but little material to the narrator of events, pure and simple.

To-day, however, there was a somewhat unusual occurrence in the form of a yacht race, by the New York squadron, which had arranged to make the run from Newport to Oak Bluffs, and then to find harbor along the island coast at will.

The whole population, permanent and transient, was agog over the anticipated event, the great majority little suspecting the disappointment so largely in store for them.

For be it known, a yacht race by craft of varying

measurements is one of the most inspiring spectacles at the start, and one of the most disappointing entertainments at the finish, that has yet been devised by the mind of man. And it was, of course, the finish only that the thousands congregated on the piers, the Sea View verandas and the plank walk, were permitted to see, and that when they were scarce aware of it. All the afternoon now and again a sail would be descried on the horizon, or perhaps two of them, standing up the sound, and then a mile or two behind one or two more, — some of which would, on examination, prove to be honest coasters, — and would pass on up by the chops, or drop into the harbor of Exham or Wexham as the case might be. And so the afternoon waxed and waned, and the tired multitude strained its eyes, and stood on one foot to rest the other, vainly watching for the magnificent pageant and the cloud of white wings which in imagination it had so fondly pictured.

But after all the race was not without its compensations. After the last yacht had passed by, and the crowds had dispersed from their various points of observation, there was the supper at the Sea View, the cigar on the veranda, or the drive homeward through the hush of evening, and best of all, the report in the morning papers, which you mailed liberally to your friends with a postal card notifying them that you were there.

Robert and the young clergyman had driven over to see the race, and had found seats in the shade of the pavilion, far down the plank walk, and where

they were undisturbed by the crowd which centred farther up the bluff. Robert had seized upon little Jimmie down by the shore near his home, and having sent him to ask his sister's permission, which was readily accorded, had given him the luxury of a beach drive.

They had sat for some time in silence, Robert pulling placidly at a cigar and both men gazing dreamily out on the tranquil waters, while Jimmie played about, when the former broke the stillness by suddenly asking : —

“Sewell, were you ever in love?”

“Yes,” responded the other, lightly : “half a dozen times.”

“Yes, but I mean a real absorbing passion, that seemed to crowd out everything else.”

“And so do I. That was the kind I had every time,” insisted the young divine.

“What !” exclaimed Robert in astonishment ; “do you mean to say that every one of those fancies took such complete hold upon you that it was your life while it lasted, entered into all your motives and actions, was your meat and your drink, and colored and controlled your life for the time being?”

“Just that.”

“Well,” said Robert, doubtfully, “I must of course take you at your word. But perhaps I may at least be permitted to express my surprise.”

“And you would like to add, I suppose, that you had hardly expected to hear such a relation of experiences from a clergyman?”

"Yes, if it would not be rude."

"Well, I'll overlook that, and consider it said. And now for my justification. One of course can judge only by one's own experience and observation. I confess that ever since my boyhood I have been falling in love and falling out. For one reason and another — first of course because of the absurdity of it, and afterwards because of my comparative poverty and other considerations — none of my predilections seemed to "materialize" as the mediums say, and one after another came to an end and left me as I believed inconsolable. And yet after a while the first sharpness of grief would wear away, leaving a burden of heaviness and sense of loss which would gradually grow lighter and less, and finally perhaps change of scene would complete the cure, or a new interest efface the old one. I am speaking of course of loss in life; what might have been my experience had death intervened I am unable to say. And perhaps I am not yet old enough to speak of these things from the standpoint of full maturity. But this is my belief — and I know I shall jar on your fastidious sense of the way things ought to be: outside of kinship the direction or disposition of the affections is largely controlled by circumstances. A young man goes to live in Boston, and marries a very different sort of a woman from the one who would have become his wife if he had happened to select New York. Or the fact of his living on the east side of a village instead of the west may control his destiny. With many a man it's the first girl that throws a glance over her shoul-

der at him that does the business, and considerations of neighborhood and opportunity enter largely into the solution of the problem every time."

"Then," says Robert, "you are not a believer in the doctrine that marriages are made in heaven?"

"No ; there are too many facts that militate against it. Look at the great majority of married couples who have come under your own observation. Take the people with whom I am living now, or those with whom you are quartered, or any others you please, and nine cases out of ten you find what? If not open and notorious disagreement, you find a sort of agreement to disagree, a settling down into a kind of bear-and-forbear condition, which perhaps, from long discipline, has almost ceased to be irksome, but which is as far removed from a heaven-born arrangement as the darkness from the light. No, my dear fellow ; men *choose* their wives, under the limitations already suggested — they are not chosen for them — and heaven has the same hand in it that it has in ordering the conduct of men in any other of the relations of life."

"What !" said Robert ; "do you mean that men select their wives as they do a horse or a house?"

"No," replied the parson ; "because the element of passion enters into the former transaction, and is, of course, absent from the latter. But I mean that so far as the intervention of any supernatural agency is concerned, there is no difference. A man meets a woman, and soon discovers that she exerts an attractive influence upon him, — not the same kind of an

influence that a satisfactory house or horse exerts, but nevertheless as personal to her, and as independent of any heavenly direction, as in the case of the other objects of desire I have mentioned. It is a matter between him and her, to be settled by them without supernatural assistance, and, as in other affairs, fully as likely to be settled wrong as right."

"I may assume, then, that you see no difficulty in the way of one who has loved and lost, loving again, with equal fervor and sincerity as before."

"Yes, you may assume that. I do not mean to say that this is always so. I have no doubt that in the case of certain sensitive and imaginative natures, the impression produced by the first passion is so strong that neither time, nor absence, nor change of scene is able to efface it. If life be left, the fire on the altar may for a time appear to have grown dim under the influence of separation and new interests, only to flash forth with greater intensity should circumstances repeat themselves and the old conditions be restored. But what I have said, I have said of the generality of mankind, of the unimpressible natures that we see about us, and that constitute nineteen twentieths of the human family.

"Now I am aware," continued the minister, gravely, as his companion remained silent, "that what I have said might sound very loose and heterodox to many people to whom I might have addressed it, and there are very few, for instance, of my own parishioners, to whom I should have ventured to deliver myself so freely for fear of being misunderstood. But you

will have observed, if you have followed me at all closely, that, after all, nothing I have said conflicts with the principles of that religion which I have undertaken to teach, and is only a perhaps somewhat unattractive statement of things as they actually are."

While this conversation was going on Jimmie had been playing about in the vicinity, running down the bank to the shore, "skipping" stones and shells over the surface of the water, and amusing himself in the ways peculiar to his age.

As the minister ceased speaking Robert's attention was drawn to the movements of a man who had strolled along the beach to a point where Jimmie was playing, just in front of them, and had paused and was evidently watching the child. Perceiving that his scrutiny had been observed by the persons on the bank he continued his walk, but presently turned and retraced his steps to the same spot and evidently engaged the boy in conversation for a moment, then after a lingering look passed on. He was a fine looking man, dressed in well-fitting gray, and with one of the most melancholy and careworn faces Robert remembered ever to have seen.

"There goes a man," said he, turning to his companion, "who might make one of the few exceptions of life-long constancy to a lost love whom you admitted might exist."

"Yes," replied the other, slowly. "I can easily believe him to go sorrowing all his days for one who is lost from earth, or at least lost to him. I never

saw such an expression of settled melancholy and on so noble a face."

Just then Jimmie came up to where they were sitting and Robert interrogated him.

"Who was the gentleman who spoke to you just now?"

"I don't know," replied the boy wonderingly.

"Did he think he knew you?"

"I don't know. He looked at me hard, then he asked my names."

"And you told him?"

"Yes," said the boy, brightly; "and he kind of started, so" (making an expressive gesture), "and then asked me where I lived, and if my father and mother were living. And I said that mamma was dead and that I lived over in the next town with papa and sister. And then he looked kind of disappointed and gave me this" — showing a bright piece of silver — "and went away."

Neither Robert nor Sewell seemed specially impressed by the incident, and after supper and a walk through the city of cottages in the cool of the evening the three returned to their village, well pleased with the day's diversions.

The episode of the stranger's interview with Jimmie had faded from Robert's mind by the time he had found his couch, but the young clergyman's remarks on love and constancy, though far from receiving his indorsement in all respects, occupied his thoughts far into the night.

CHAPTER X.

THE members of the Ladies' Literary League had been taking tea at Squire Crocker's handsome residence, and were now seated on their host's broad veranda discussing such matters of feminine interest as any of them chanced to introduce.

"By the way, girls," cried Miss Guppy, a sparkling young maiden of forty-seven summers, "what's become of that handsome Mr. Lynden, who created such a furor at the minister's reception?"

"I don't know, for one," said Dorothy Cleveland, with a look of sublime indifference; "and that isn't the worst of it." Miss Cleveland was the bachelor Squire's niece, rather a distinguished looking young lady, and the hostess for this occasion.

"For him, I suppose you mean," volunteered Grace North, the acknowledged belle of the village.

"As you please," returned Miss Cleveland. "However, I presume he isn't suffering, and I don't see anybody in this company who appears to be really pining."

"No, indeed!" in emphatic chorus.

"Still," resumed the first speaker, with sweet insistence, "it does seem a pity that so gifted and attractive a young man should bestow his society altogether on the winds and waves, to the utter

neglect of those of his kind with whom he might find congenial companionship."

"I don't know just how you would apply the words 'kind' and 'congenial,'" exclaimed Puss Taber, a saucy little flirt with a heart of gold, and to the influence of whose charms young Parson Sewell was believed to have been not altogether impervious; "but if you mean that he is denying himself all feminine society you are away off."

"You don't mean it!" all fortissimo.

"Yes, I do," cries little Missy gleefully; "and you'll be even more surprised when I tell you who is the lady."

"Do tell us quickly, — don't keep us in suspense," implored Miss Guppy, with a most engaging anxiety.

"Yes, let's hear the worst and have it over" — chorus.

"Well, I'll tell you," said the little Taber, proceeding with evident enjoyment of her task; "it's Elinor Austin, over on the bluff. Nobody knows of his being there very much in person, but he has sent her no end of fruit and bundles of books, and seems to have almost adopted that little boy."

"Another illustration of the truth that there's no accounting for tastes," remarked Miss North, with a half rising inflection; "and she's welcome to him."

"I'm not so sure of there being anything unaccountable in this case," replied Puss, brushing a refractory crimp from her eye. "I must say Miss Austin is one of the queenliest looking girls that I ever saw. If she's as intelligent and agreeable as

she is striking in appearance I don't wonder at his being attracted."

"I suppose she's well enough looking," admits the bi-centenarian, adjusting the ruffle around her rather skinny wrist; "but under all the circumstances I should have supposed that a fastidious gentleman such as Mr. Lynden appears to be would hardly have considered the acquaintance desirable."

"What circumstances?" cried Penelope Hoyt, rushing to Miss Taber's rescue. Miss Hoyt didn't care anything about Elinor Austin, but she was one of those uncomfortable people who are much given to disputations, though she was exempt from the still more unpleasant propensity for making unimportant corrections which some women appear to revel in; and she no sooner perceived that somebody was being attacked than she rose to the occasion.

"What circumstances?" simpered Miss Guppy, with elevated eye-brows. "Really, my dear, there are some things which one can hardly discuss. I should suppose that the sight of that baby that the old man calls his son would be sufficient to deter particular people from cultivating the family very much!"

"I see nothing peculiar about it whatever," snapped Penelope. "The boy's mother was a second wife and a good deal younger than her husband, and that's all there is about it as far as I can see."

"George — I mean Mr. Sewell," stammered Miss Taber, "says they seem to fairly idolize the child. The old man sets his eyes by him."

"Speaking of Mr. Sewell," said the hostess, deftly changing the subject, "he and Mr. Lynden seem to be great friends. What time he can spare from his pastoral duties, — or at least a good deal of it," — with a glance at Miss Pussy, "he is with Mr. Lynden, riding, sailing, or wandering off afoot."

"I don't think it looks very well," objected Miss Hoyt, promptly. "Mr. Lynden is n't at all religious — he is even accused of being an atheist — and his influence cannot be very advantageous to a minister."

"I imagine," says Miss Cleveland, in her tranquil manner, "that Mr. Sewell is not in any special danger from anybody's influence, at least among the men. He seems to me a man eminently able to take care of himself. Moreover, he perhaps hopes to benefit his friend after a while."

At this point the object of this discussion made his appearance, accompanied by other male friends, and an adjournment inside was had for music and other diversions.

It was observed, however, that the clergyman and Miss Taber lingered outside for a moment to observe a peculiar effect of the now rising moon.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. OWEN, Lynden's landlord, was chairman of the School Committee of Exham, a board, by the way, about as singularly constituted as could be found in any small town in the country. Besides Mr. Owen, whose personality has already been referred to, and which was perhaps not characterized by any striking peculiarity, there were two other members, both of whom are worthy of more than a passing notice.

Gideon Shore, the member for the outlying district, was as contradictory in his make-up as could well be imagined. Of slender frame and the countenance of an advanced consumptive, he was reported to be possessed of herculean strength and the courage of a lion. Of refined taste and considerable culture, he was a complete despot in his house, and the terror of most of those who were compelled to have anything to do with him.

He would come forth from his well-stocked library, for instance, where he had passed an agreeable hour with his favorite authors and the latest current literature, and proceed to slaughter a calf whose head he would make his wife hold while he applied the knife.

In all the relations of life these contradictory

phases presented themselves, until the most studious observer was at his wit's end to know what estimate to place on so incongruous a character.

The third member was a superannuated old gentleman, a childless widower, once a physician, who was living now on the residue of his professional savings, supplemented by such stray bits of public patronage as chanced to fall to his lot. In committee matters he was great in little things, and little in great things, and was chiefly valuable as a concurrer with the chairman.

And here it may be remarked that there is no more useful quality in a committeeman who is not adapted to leadership, than a faculty for readily coinciding with the views of more positive and aggressive members. By virtue of this delightful quality inherent in his associates some one strong spirit is enabled to hold a considerable body of men well in hand, friction and contention are avoided, and everything proceeds pleasantly and harmoniously to a felicitous conclusion.

This singularly compounded committee held a meeting at the house of the chairman, a few days after the literary social already mentioned, to consider the matter of the reassignment of teachers to the several schools in the township — a number of resignations and one or two removals having reduced the corps of instructors to a scant complement, and necessitated likewise a new distribution.

The meeting was held in the "front room" below, near an open window of which Robert sat smoking outside.

The associate committeemen having arrived, and the usual social interchanges having been accomplished, the chairman perfunctorily announced the object of the meeting, at the same time producing from a drawer in a desk a bundle of applications.

"Taking the requests in the order of the schools to which they relate," said the chairman, "I will read first the application of Mr. T. W. Tilden, who asks for reappointment to the position of principal of the Grammar School, and is the only one so applying. What do you say to that, gentlemen?"

"This is what I say to it," said Gideon Shore, in a rasping voice: "he don't half earn his money, and he sits up nights working for newspapers. No man can serve two masters," he added, piously.

"True," replied the chairman, temporizingly; "he ought to consider that his first obligation is to the town which employs him, and that private interests must not be permitted to interfere with the proper performance of a public duty. We are bound to remember, however, that by reason of his residence here Mr. Tilden is enabled to do the work at a considerably lower rate of compensation than a man called here expressly for the purpose, and that also it is the general belief that the school has never been better conducted than under his administration. Perhaps we ought to consider these things, Neighbor Shore?"

"P'r'aps," snapped the picturesque granger, shaken a little by the allusion to the difference in wages. "But when a man wants to work for me my motto

is, 'take it or leave it; you're either my man or somebody else's!'"

"What's your opinion, doctor?" said the chairman now, as a matter of form.

"Well, Mr. Chairman," replied the doctor, feebly, "I can't help perceiving the force of Neighbor Shore's remarks, and I fully agree with him that we are entitled to, as it were, the undivided energies of our employees. Still, on the other hand, we know what a burden of taxation we all have to carry" — the doctor's tax was two dollars a year, — "and it strikes me that in view of that circumstance we might do well to try Mr. Tilden another term, with perhaps an admonition, so to speak, in respect to engaging in other avocations."

"All right then," said the chairman, briskly, — he had grown a trifle uneasy during this long and measured deliverance, — "we'll try him once more, Brother Shore, and leave the event."

The request for reappointment of Mr. Tilden's assistant was then read and granted without debate, and then came the application of the lady principal in the intermediate department, who closed her petition with a reminder to the committee that she had always "stood by" them through thick and thin, and if reappointed would continue to do so.

"Confound that woman!" growled Gideon. "What does she mean by such foolery? Who the dickens wants her to 'stand by' anybody, anyhow?"

"Well, I don't suppose anybody's very particular about it," admitted the chairman, reflectively; "but

she's always had a notion that the whole administration rested on her shoulders, and as it has n't seemed to interfere with her usefulness, and as after all she has never fallen into the error somewhat prevalent among women teachers of thinking it beneath her dignity to take any direction from the committee, I've been disposed to overlook it."

"Time 't was taken out of her," snarled Gideon. "I'm down on these women that ask for your patronage and then want to square the account by 'standing by' you."

"Very true," assented the doctor; "I am quite of your opinion, Brother Shore. Still, as our chairman has, as I may say, very justly observed, Mrs. Anderson has proved a very useful teacher, and any little harmless idiosyncrasy, as it were, might, perhaps, be properly enough overlooked."

"All right," said the chairman again, more briskly than ever, as if to average up against his colleague's deliberation. "And now a few more and we are done."

Several applications were then read and disposed of in quick succession, for or against, until only two petitions remained, both by new aspirants, asking for the single outlying school now remaining unprovided for. They were both read before being considered, and the second was signed "Elinor Austin."

Robert, absorbed in his own thoughts, had given little heed to the discussion going on inside. The soft loveliness of the night held his senses in thrall, and the infrequent sounds coming up from the water

side seemed only to punctuate and make more impressive the brooding stillness. Down on the shore a numerous colony of ducks chatted together in subdued gratulation over the marine tid-bits left by the receding tide, or glided away with the same low-toned converse for an exploration of the neighboring shallows. Off in the middle distance a rowing party went lazily by with glancing oar, and the soft notes of an Italian boat song came like the music of the spheres across the intervening tide. Now and again a night-bird called hoarsely to his mate and was answered; the bell of the ferryman sent forth a lonesome peal from the further shore, and the twinkling lights of innumerable yachts and other craft bestudded the outer haven.

When, however, the name of Elinor Austin came wafted through the open window, the dreamer pricked up his ears, so to speak, and commenced to pay attention; and the subsequent discussion had not proceeded far before he had decided upon his course and noiselessly left his place.

"Austin!" exclaimed Gideon. "Is she the daughter of that disreputable old fisherman over on the bluff?"

"I suppose it is she," returned Mr. Owen. "I know of no other family of that name in the village."

"Then I'm opposed to her, tooth and nail. I don't know anything about the girl, but the father is a law-breaker and an ill-favored old pirate, and I dare say has been in jail. You may put me down No on that every time."

“Oh, well,” said the chairman, who had had everything his own way so far, and was disposed to defer to the fiery farmer where he had no preference himself: “if this application strikes you as one that ought not to be entertained” —

At this moment there was a tap on the door opening into the hall, which Mr. Owen at once responded to, and returned in a moment to say that a gentleman from another town had called upon business which would admit of no delay, and therefore, with his associates’ consent, they would defer action on remaining matters until their meeting the following week.

This was assented to and the committee adjourned.

It is perhaps needless to add that the caller was Robert, who had perceived that Miss Austin was likely to be thrown overboard incontinently, and was determined that she should have a chance for her life.

CHAPTER XII.

THE following morning, after considerable waiting until the day's duties should have been sufficiently discharged to admit of a call without too great inconvenience to the housekeeper, Robert found his way to the fisherman's cottage.

Though keeping up an almost daily consignment of books and encountering Miss Austin occasionally in his walks to the village, he had not as yet permitted himself to take advantage of the half freedom accorded to him at their last interview, and so this was his first formal call since his walk home with the girl from the minister's reception.

He found her just completing the sewing on of a loose strand of Jimmie's straw hat — having accomplished which, she placed the hat on the youngster's curly head, and with one of his swift, bright looks at the two the boy was off and away.

Then beckoning to Robert she led the way to the front room, and having placed for him a chair sat down and — cried.

The young man, shocked beyond measure at this outburst on the part of the calm, self-contained girl, made no effort to restrain this expression of her trouble, believing that whatever was the matter her tears would be a relief rather than otherwise. And so

for a few minutes they sat in silence, except for the sobs of the girl as her young frame shook with the violence of her emotion.

Little by little, however, she grew more tranquil, and at last, lifting her eyes to her visitor with a wan smile, she spoke.

"I don't know what you think of me, and I ought to apologize for bringing you in here before I was certain that you intended remaining at all. But my father is confined to his room, ill, and I thought he would be less likely to notice your presence in this part of the house. And as for my breaking down so, I have been sitting up for two or three nights, and it has made me nervous and hysterical."

"Say no more about it," said Robert, gently — wondering again within himself that he, Robert Lynden, should continue to bear this distrustful treatment by these people so patiently. "Believe me, I am most sorry to find you in trouble, and sincerely hope you will permit me to be of use to you in some way."

"You are very kind, and I am already greatly in your debt for the thoughtful attentions that have done so much to enliven my life for the past few weeks. But," sadly, "I do not think there is anything further you can do."

"By the way," said Robert, apparently desirous of changing the subject, but shrewdly suspecting that his very errand might have some bearing on the situation, "I heard your name called at a meeting of the school committee last evening. You know my

landlord is chairman of that high and mighty tribunal, and the meetings are held at his house; and as I was sitting outside, and the windows were open, I could n't help hearing more or less of what was going on."

A deep blush had overspread the girl's face while Lynden was speaking, and then receded leaving her paler than before.

"I am so sorry," she said, in a troubled tone. "I had not supposed that any one need know of it except the committee, and in case of my rejection, which I now feel is certain, none but they would know of my failure."

"What makes you so sure that you have no chance?"

"This," replied Elinor, having now somewhat regained her habitual composure. "Last night father was feeling more than usually despondent, and fearful that he might not be strong enough again for fishing, and asking what would become of us, and I to comfort him told him I had applied for a school, though I had intended waiting until I knew the result."

"A school?" he cried. "You may as well give that up at once. There is one man on the committee who will oppose it, and the others won't care and will agree with him."

"I asked him what member of the committee it was, and why he was certain he would oppose me, and he said the man's name was Shore. Mr. Shore was down at the pier trying to find how long it

would take to drown his dog by pushing him back into the water as often as he attempted to land, and just as the poor creature was about giving up the struggle my father came to the animal's rescue and took him to his boat. It was a most trivial affair, as you see, but Mr. Shore was terribly incensed, and promised my father that he would teach him not to interfere with what was n't his concern."

"He seems to be a tough kind of citizen," said Robert, "and easily riled. He, however, may not be so formidable as you imagine."

"I don't know," said Elinor, sadly. "I can't go and ask his pardon in my father's behalf, you know, because there's nothing to pardon. And I can hardly expect that the other members will interest themselves in one who is almost a stranger to them, and against the objection of one of their number."

"Oh, well," insisted Robert, "don't give it up. There's no telling what a day may bring forth."

Just then Jimmie came running in, and proclaimed that he was hungry. "You know, sister, there was n't much breakfast."

"I know it, Jimmie; but you know I was too busy with papa to do much about it. Go and get a cooky or something from the pantry."

"But there is n't any cooky, nor any bread, nor anything," insisted the boy, whose usual keenness seemed to have deserted him on this occasion. "I looked."

Marking the quivering lip of the despairing girl, and suspecting the true state of affairs, Robert here

arose, and remarking that he would like to have Jimmie do an errand for him in the village, took a hurried leave and passed out, followed by the boy.

Elinor sat for a long time after Lynden had gone, her drooping figure suggestive of the deep dejection that possessed her.

After a while, however, she roused herself and returned to the living-room, whence she was about to go to her father, when her steps were arrested by the entrance of Jimmie, who was busily engaged on a mince turnover.

"Look, sister; I went on just the least little bit of an errand for him, and see what he gave me."

Elinor examined the bright little coin, and saw at once it was a quarter-eagle. She flushed as she reflected that this was the first out-and-out act of charity of which they had been the object.

"I'm afraid, Jimmie, he didn't mean to give you so much for the little you say you did for him."

"Yes, he did; and he said that perhaps you wouldn't have time to make me any cookies very much while papa was sick, and you could buy some with this." And so saying he deposited the gift in his sister's hand and went out to play.

This was on Friday. On the following Monday the school committee held their adjourned meeting, at which Mr. Owen with all deference to his dissenting colleague, submitted a number of reasons why Miss Austi was likely to make a more acceptable teacher than the rival claimant, in all of which he was ably seconded by the good doctor, and vigor-

ously but unavailingly combated by the truculent Gideon.

And so the black cloud which had been hovering over the Austin household was dissipated, at least for a season, and the commercial credit so necessary to the invalid was at once restored.

And while this little difficulty was being adjusted by the committee inside Robert Lynden sat out on the veranda with his feet on the rail, watching with tranquil satisfaction the wreaths of smoke from his cigar as they wafted off into space.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was "Illumination night" at Cottage City. All day long on the "Bluffs," on the old "Camp Ground," and even over on the high lands "beyond Jordan," the work of preparation had been going forward and now the results were apparent from one end of the summer city to the other.

It was an inspiring spectacle. The avenues on the Bluffs, the Camp Ground, and Washington Park on the Highlands, were ablaze with Chinese lanterns and many colored fires; brass bands discoursed music here and there, while from various points fireworks without stint, and in all manner of ingenious devices, were displayed for the entertainment of the moving crowds.

The "annual illumination" had not yet ceased to be fashionable, and the Tuckers, the Spragues, the Rusts, the Spinneys, the Motts, the Corbins, the Sages, the Van Slycks, the houses of Landers and Barnes, and all the other magnates, vied with each other in the amount and variety of their decorations, and in the brilliancy of their fiery display.

Lynden and Sewell, neither of whom had ever witnessed a similar spectacle, made a thorough tour of the "City"; meeting, passing, jostling the countless

strollers, whose good-natured chatter added buoyance and life to the scene.

"This certainly is a lovely place, by night or noon," remarked Sewell, as they stopped for a moment to greet Judge ———, a handsome, courtly old gentleman whose cottage faced the broad park on which was the preaching stand, and to whom both young men had taken a strong liking. "It seems to me, though — and this unusual glare makes the fact more apparent — that some of these people are living more in the face and eyes of one another than is altogether agreeable."

"More so, perhaps, than might seem to be agreeable to an on-looker," replied the Judge. "But the fact that the same people have been returning here year after year for so long, many of them to hired cottages at that, is pretty conclusive evidence that it is, at least, not disagreeable to *them*."

"Spoken like a lawyer," laughed the minister. "But doesn't it strike you as being a little singular?"

"I felt so at first, but not after I had had opportunity to test it a little. We all like change; and to these people, who for ten months in the year live in cities, big and little, where every family fortifies itself against its neighbors' observation as carefully as though a vandal invasion was feared — to them the free-and-easy, open-house manner of living prevalent here has, therefore, all the greater charm. Besides, one sees as much as one's neighbor, and has only to listen in order to overhear; so there is compensation after all."

"Your explanation is at least ingenious," replied Sewell; "and perhaps accounts as well as any for what is evidently an incontrovertible fact. For myself, however, I must say I should prefer a little more seclusion."

"Very likely," said Lynden; "and so might I, and so might the Judge if he did n't have a whole park between himself and his neighbors over the way. But it is the preference of other people rather than our own that we are trying to account for, and I think his Honor has done it very successfully."

The conversation from this point took a wider range for a half hour, and then the two friends, bidding the Judge and his family good evening, made their way round to the landing, and mounting to the raised and covered platform provided for that purpose, seated themselves to watch the outpouring of passengers from the late boat, now just arrived.

A strong light thrown upon the pier brought out the faces of the fast-moving stream with considerable distinctness, and the young men had been seated but a few minutes when Sewell suddenly remarked: "There's our knight of the rueful countenance," at the same time motioning with his head to a point below.

Robert looked, and there sure enough was the tall form of the stranger who had interviewed Jimmie shouldering its way up to the Sea View steps. The same look of settled melancholy which they had before remarked still rested upon the man's countenance and he appeared utterly indifferent to what was going on about him.

“Sewell,” said Robert, “I am going to do a thing that I never was guilty of before. I’m going to spy on that man to the extent of following him up to the desk and seeing what name he registers.”

Before his companion had opportunity to agree or protest, Robert was putting his resolve into execution, and Sewell saw no reason why he should n’t follow. Accordingly, they reached the register together, the guest going immediately to his room, and there read the last entry, “John Fairfax, England.”

“Well,” said Sewell, regarding his friend with an amused smile, “he might have been a Roosian, a Persian or a Proosian, but it seems he’s an Englishman.”

“Yes,” returned Robert; “and much good does it do us. To tell the truth, I’m already ashamed of my curiosity, and can hardly imagine what I expected to find.”

“Well, I’m sure I can’t. And now suppose we have some supper. It’s more than two hours after my usual time, and I’m as hungry as a shark.”

They accordingly entered the dining-room, whence, after a leisurely satisfying of the inner man, they were issuing forth, when Sewell stopped to greet a brother clergyman from a distant city, and Robert passed on to the reading-room, which he found unoccupied, all the guests being outside.

Hardly had he taken a seat and commenced the perusal of an evening paper, when the sound of some one entering the room attracted his attention,

and glancing up he perceived the melancholy stranger.

"I beg your pardon," said the man, accosting Robert with grave courtesy; "but I would like to make myself known to you, and then with your permission to ask you one or two questions."

"Certainly," said Lynden, accepting the tender of a card bearing the name already inscribed on the hotel register, and responding with his own.

"Pardon me if I seem inquisitive about that which may not appear to concern me," began Fairfax, "but I can assure you that my questions are not prompted by motives of mere curiosity."

Lynden, impressed by the man's dignified bearing as well as by the tale of trouble written in the lines of his face, intimated that he should be happy to furnish him with any information in his possession.

"Were you not at this place on the day of the New York yacht race, in company with another gentleman and a little fair-haired boy?"

Robert assented.

"Something in the boy's face," continued Fairfax, his lip barely betraying his agitation, "reminded me so strongly of a long-lost friend, that I stopped and asked him his name. He said it was Austin, — Jimmie Austin. Was that correct?"

"It was," replied Robert, moved in spite of himself by his questioner's manner.

"He said further that he lived over in the next village with his father and sister. Was that also true?"

Robert again replied in the affirmative.

"Can you tell me anything about the family's history?" pursued Mr. Fairfax.

"I can only say," answered Robert, "that the father's name is James Austin, and they came to this island from New York a few years ago, the family then consisting of the husband, wife, and two children—the wife being a second wife, and the younger child the offspring of the second marriage. The wife died soon after arriving here, and the daughter keeps the house."

"There appears to be nothing peculiar about the family?" suggested Fairfax, with a pathetic appeal in his voice that made Robert's heart go out to him. "Nothing mysterious, or that looks like concealment?"

"No; they are wofully poor, and the old man is n't very popular among his fellow-fishermen, and has evidently seen better days. Moreover he seems to be morbidly opposed to his family extending their acquaintance among the people of the town. But I have never heard it intimated that there was anything unusual or unaccountable about the family, and the old man's holding himself so aloof is doubtless owing to his poverty and the hypochondria engendered by prolonged ill health."

"Then I am again without hope," groaned Fairfax in bitterness of spirit. "The coincidence of name, and the strong physical resemblance, alike count for nothing as against the hard facts to which you have testified. The country is full of Austins, but ever

since I saw you on that day the face of that child has haunted me ; and though I went back to New York satisfied that the resemblance was only a chance one as proved by the boy's answers, I was never able to rid myself of the feeling that perhaps I ought to have prosecuted my inquiry further. And so I came back again, determined if necessary to go to the boy's home and interrogate his people. My falling in with you, however, has saved me that necessity, and your testimony has shown me how fruitless would have been an investigation in that quarter. I must now return at once to New York, and there resume the prosecution of a search which I cannot abandon, but which seems to me now utterly hopeless."

A short silence followed the conclusion of this speech, Fairfax giving himself up to the bitterness of his disappointment, Lynden unable to find words of consolation for what was evidently so deep an affliction.

Presently the Englishman broke the silence in a way quite to Lynden's surprise.

"You may wonder that I should care to confide in a stranger, and the time has been when I should have astonished myself by any such proceeding. But prolonged suffering and heartsickness break a man's pride, or at least beat down the barriers which he has been accustomed to rear about him, and move him to claim fellowship and sympathy where before he would have felt debarred. And so if you are willing to hear it I think it will do me good to tell you why I am here."

Robert expressed his readiness, and Fairfax proceeded : —

“ My name is John Fairfax, as you have seen, and I am now, so far as I know, the sole representative of our particular branch of that family, certain of whose members have been closely identified with the history of your own country. We are by no means great folks, but my own progenitors have fortunately for me been more successful financially than some of the titled members of the family.

“ About six years ago, my father being then alive though in feeble health, I returned from India to London in a merchant ship commanded by one Richard Austin, and by reason of certain circumstances which I need not rehearse here, was entertained for a day or two at Capt. Austin’s house. There I saw his daughter, Grace Austin. I will not undertake to enlarge upon her charms now, nor to describe the impression which she at once produced upon me. Suffice it to say that I left the house with her image stamped indelibly upon my heart, and with a determination to see her again at the earliest opportunity.

“ From that time on I saw her at frequent intervals, always as it happened in the absence of her father — she had a young sister but no mother living — and at the end of six months she consented to a secret marriage. This, I should explain, was necessary unless we were willing to wait indefinitely, as my father had other plans for me, and we could not afford to incur his displeasure.

“ So we were married in an obscure suburb of the city, and went quietly off for a tour of the continent

Of the months of wedded bliss that followed, as we roamed up and down, visiting the historic cities of Southern Europe, and lingering in her pleasant places, I will say nothing. Our life and love flowed along in an uninterrupted river of delight, until one day, in a lonely country place in Italy, where we were staying, having wandered away into the wilderness farther than I intended, I was suddenly surrounded by brigands, and seized and borne away to the mountains. Then, after a fortnight's solitary confinement, they named the ransom for which they would liberate me, — a sum so enormous that both my indignation and consideration for my father constrained me to decline the proposition. Then a week intervened, and another somewhat reduced demand, — which was also declined, — and so from week to week, until fortune at last favored me and I escaped, and, after wandering many days, made my way back to the place where I had left my wife.

“But nearly three months had elapsed, and the poor child, worn out with waiting and the vain search for me, and with her money nearly gone, — this I learned from our landlord, — had at last given up the quest in despair, and returned to her home. Thither I followed her at once, only to learn from their old housekeeper, whom I traced to another house, that Captain Austin had never credited his daughter's story of her marriage, but, on the contrary, had placed the worst possible construction on her flight, and insisted that her pretended husband had voluntarily abandoned her. And so, broken in spirit, and at the same time suffering in health and

overtaken by financial reverses, he had realized on the remnant of property still his own, and sailed with his family for America, having made no attempt whatever to ascertain the true facts of the case. Meanwhile our child had been born, — a boy.

“Ascertaining the name of the steamer in which they sailed, I followed the family to New York, where I lost all trace of them ; and, in spite of my unremitting efforts, assisted by the best detective talent that could be found, — I have been, perhaps, foolishly sensitive about going into the newspapers, — I have been unable to discover any clue to their whereabouts since ; and I may add that nearly all of the time has been wasted following false leads, South and West.

“And now,” concluded Fairfax, turning his sad face toward Robert, “you understand how a chance resemblance, discovered in the face of a little boy, has power to send me running up and down over the face of the earth, asking impertinent questions of every one who appears good-natured enough to be likely to answer them, and inflicting my woful story on those to whom, perhaps, it is a hardship to have to listen.”

“It certainly,” replied Lynden, “has been no hardship to me. I have been more affected than I can tell you by the sad recital, and you have my heartfelt wishes for the final success of your search.”

At that moment Mr. Sewell appeared on the scene, and, bidding his new acquaintance a sympathizing good night, Robert rejoined his friend, and the two took carriage for home.

CHAPTER XIV.

SEPTEMBER had come, and with it the fall fishing and the opening of the village schools.

Captain Austin had recovered partially from his severe indisposition, and on fine days went "outside" in pursuit of the autumnal bluefish, which is to the earlier variety as a salmon to a shad. His trips were somewhat irregular, however, and it was evident that unless there was a radical change in his condition he would not another season be entrusted with a boat.

The thought that provision for their more pressing needs had been made, at least for a time, comforted the old man's heart, while his daughter went about her new duties with a hopeful courage that was inspiring to witness.

Rising at six o'clock, she had prepared and they had partaken of the morning meal, a lunch had been set for her father and Jimmie and her own put in a basket, and two hours later she was ready for her walk across the fields and through the wood to the district school-house.

It was a pleasant walk ; through trim lanes whose velvety sward made restful footing, across still smiling fields where mild-eyed cattle glanced approvingly up at the lithe figure and then returned to

their perpetual grazing ; through groves of oak and walnut whose verdure was still comforting to the eye and whose dense foliage made grateful shelter from the wind ; over wide reaches of common, gilded with golden-rod and brown with ripening wood-grass and the wild bean.

The school-house was a comfortable but primitive structure. A single square room with a box of an entry formed its interior, and no trace of paint had defiled the virgin wood within or without. The walls — except for occasional ink-splashed spaces that would not “cover” — were kept fairly white ; a square wood stove stood in the centre of the room ; triangular little shelves that some æsthetic school-marm had decorated with lambrequins occupied the corners ; the teacher’s desk — generally littered with the floral offerings of admiring pupils — confronted the school, and a pair of infirm chairs stood near for the accommodation of visitors.

The children were about an average lot — one bright one to three dullards. There was the inevitable awkward and overgrown girl, a head taller than the teacher ; the boy with a sore heel ; the little girl who could not be induced to use a nosekerchief ; the midget who was at the head of every class in everything ; and later there would be the stalwart young granger coming in for his annual three months of winter schooling.

All these varied sizes, temperaments and intelligences, to the number of about twenty, Miss Austin found herself set to discipline and instruct, and for

the moment she feared she had undertaken a task far beyond her capacity.

But she underestimated her own powers. As day succeeded day, the even disposition, the quiet firmness, the uniform good temper, the sweet seriousness of manner, and possibly more than all the attractive physical presence, had their effect upon her miscellaneous family, and the slight feeling of awe with which they commenced was soon transformed into the warmest affection and esteem.

Robert, who had long before developed a fondness for rambling about the country in this and other directions, could not resist the temptation to drop in occasionally as he passed by, simply, as he assured the scholars at the close of the exercises, to say a word of encouragement to them in their arduous journey up the hill of learning.

It seemed to him that these hours — sometimes bright mornings, but oftener drowsy afternoons — were the happiest that he had passed since coming to Exham. Under cover of that extraordinary interest in the cause of education which had now taken possession of his soul, he could sit for hour after hour listening to the rich tones of the teacher's voice, as she opened up the book of knowledge to her young charge; watching the graceful figure moving about with its unconscious stateliness; catching an occasional glance from the glorious eyes, and wondering if the rising flush were interest or only embarrassment; holding no conversation, but simply basking in an atmosphere of sublime content.

Conscious of certain weaknesses in his own composition, the companionship of this strong, self-poised young woman seemed to invigorate him, as it were, like a stimulating tonic, and to impart a mental and even physical robustness to himself, of which he sometimes realized his need. Not that he was lamentably lacking in either respect, nor that there was a redundancy of either in her. Robert's water-side summer had made a fairly strong man of him in body, and as for his mind, there never had been a lack of ability, though possibly of energy.

On the other hand Elinor was far from impressing one with any over-development of physique in spite of her superb young womanhood, while in mental resources she was immeasurably the inferior of Robert. She had read but comparatively little, of fact or of fiction, and her admirer would, perhaps, have been pained to know how many of the books he had sent her she had as yet been unable to read with interest, because, whatever her natural capacity, her scant literary apprenticeship had not educated her to the level of their comprehension.

Nevertheless, there was about her a certain mental equilibrium which had an indescribable charm for Robert, as contrasted with his own somewhat erratic tendencies, and which, moreover, he imagined would ever hold under firm control both the womanly and womanish impulses of her strong nature.

For that it was a strong nature he was well convinced. Beneath that tranquil exterior he believed he saw fountains of tenderness and love, long re-

pressed, but which some time would burst the barriers of pride and reserve so long guarding them, and bless forever the life of him who should succeed in calling them forth.

Robert sometimes remained late enough to accompany Elinor home at the close of the day, but not often. When he did remain, the walk home was a thing to be remembered. All the glories of nature in early fall were about them; the trees cast brooding shadows as they wandered through the wood; sweet scents and sounds of field and farm came wafted through the early gloaming, and all the while this gracious presence at his side thrilled him without contact by the mere knowledge of her being there.

Often he was on the point of saying something of the sentiment that possessed him, but always was restrained by two things.

His uncertainty of himself ever rose to plague him. Again and again, when it seemed to him that heaven could hold no greater happiness than the love of this beautiful woman, came to him the question, Would it be lasting? Would there come a time when her beauty would pass upon him; when her composure of manner would be only heaviness, her majesty change to masculinity, and her sweet seriousness seem only dulness and discontent?

The other obstacle was his mother.

CHAPTER XV.

BUT little has been said of Robert Lynden's mother in this narration, and the only occasion for any more extended allusion to her now is the opposition which she began to develop to what she perceived to be a growing interest in her son's mind for Elinor Austin.

Mrs. Lynden was emphatically a "nice" woman. She was not specially accomplished. Intellectually she was but little above the average of fairly educated women. Her progenitors had been professional and semi-professional people, none of them very distinguished or very rich — in brief, she belonged to what may be styled first-class mediocrity.

But this real commonplaceness she had striven to overcome by an assumption of reticent superiority — unaggressive but no less evident — and by living a retired and semi-ascetic life, of which the community about her was permitted to have little knowledge. And she was partially successful in accomplishing her purpose. Her townspeople had come unconsciously to feel that a woman — a widow at that and often alone — who could live in apparent content entirely independent of the little social interchanges which were necessary to render their own existence endurable, must be made of different material from themselves, and must have within herself a capacity

for self-entertainment with which they had not been endowed.

Robert's father had been far superior to his mother in both mind and heart, and from him he had inherited a thorough abhorrence of all sham and pretension, and a firm conviction that there were not a few people about him as "good" as himself. Nevertheless, while perceiving the lack of genuineness in his mother's make-up and the mistaken motive by which her life was ordered, he appreciated her many admirable qualities, realized the entirety with which she had devoted her life to his welfare, and loved her with deep affection.

His growing attachment for the fisherman's daughter was the first point of difference that had ever risen between them, and this had not as yet occasioned any actual unpleasantness, though Mrs. Lynden's disapproval of that young person had been sufficiently evident to Robert to make him doubtful of ever winning her to his way of thinking—or the way in which he felt himself fast getting to think.

"Remember, my son," said Mrs. Lynden on one occasion, when Robert had betrayed his interest in Elinor more palpably than ever before: "remember that an engagement of this kind is entered into for life, and consider if this girl possesses the attributes that will make a life-union with her the highest happiness for you. Think what her associations have been for the last five years at least—the very time when she was most susceptible to outside influences."

“Associations? She has n’t had any.”

“I suppose you mean she has n’t had any associates — any young companions. So much the worse!” said Mrs. Lynden triumphantly, but shifting her ground as women will. “If a young and beautiful girl as you describe her to be has no companions among those of her own age there must be some good reason for it.”

“But I am informed” — Robert did n’t say by whom — “that her father objects to her forming intimacies in the village, and that that is so well understood that no one has as yet attempted to invade their seclusion. That ought to commend them to you,” added Robert, with just a suspicion of mischief in his eye.

“It might,” replied Mrs. Lynden, coldly, without noticing the look, “if they were a different kind of people. But as it is, my own inference would be quite otherwise.”

“I don’t understand you.”

“The construction I should place upon this affectation of exclusiveness in people of their condition in life,” said the widow, severely, “is either that there has been something in their history which the father dreads to have inquired into and so cuts off all approaches to familiarity, or else that he has not that confidence in his daughter which it is desirable for a parent to have.”

Robert flushed hotly. “There is nothing in their family history that needs concealment, and her life is holy. Perhaps as much can not be said of all those

whom we have been pleased, through life, to consider as of 'our class.' Don't think me rude or unfilial. We certainly can't travel together on the road you have just indicated. Not even maternal solicitude can justify an insinuation like your last."

And so saying the young man seized his hat and walked wrathfully out, and betook him to one of his long rambles across the fields.

He had replied courageously to his mother's intimations that all was not as it should be with the Austins, and he felt as confident as he did of his own existence that her last innuendo was as false as it was cruel. The girl's treatment of himself was sufficient evidence of that if he had needed any.

But although her suggestion that there had been something unwholesome in the family history, — some skeleton in the closet that must by no chance be exposed, — had been confidently controverted by him, his mind now recurred to it with misgiving. Might there not be something such as his mother had indicated? Was it not even evident that there had been unpleasant passages in the lives of some of them? The father's reticence, his disinclination to permit his daughter the companionship of others, that daughter's repressed manner, the child of the captain's old age — all these things impressed him more seriously than they had ever done before.

Musing thus, with eyes bent upon the ground, he came suddenly upon Elinor returning from school, lunch basket in hand, with a weary look about the sensitive mouth and a wistful gaze in the sombre eyes,

and the supple figure less pronounced in its carriage than generally it seemed.

Her face brightened at the sight of Robert, and she endeavored to resume her usual serenity of manner. But not before he had observed the dreariness of her mood. His heart went out toward her as he wondered what had caused it.

"It is ages since I have seen you, Miss Austin," began Robert ; "and I had almost begun to think you studied to avoid me."

"No," replied Elinor, with eyes on the ground ; "but you know you haven't been to see the school of late, and I cannot, — that is, I am not likely to meet you elsewhere."

"It is true," said Robert, a little self-consciously, "that I haven't manifested my usual interest in your pupils ; but I am always out of doors, and it seems as though, whenever I chance to take your accustomed road home, you have chosen, on that particular occasion, to go some other way."

"You must not think it designed," said the girl, quickly ; "I am quite irregular about my route home, and it has been purely a mischance that you have not met me."

"You say 'mischance,' " said Robert, tentatively. "Would it have been accurate to have said 'misfortune?'"

"It might have seemed a misfortune to one and not to the other. I used 'mischance' as safer, and as applicable from the standpoint of either."

"Very diplomatically answered," replied Robert,

laughingly, somewhat taken aback at this bit of fencing. "After all, we are only playing at words,—a most unprofitable pastime. Let me join you on your way to school to-morrow (I suppose you will go this way), and I will not harbor any suspicion that you try to avoid me."

Elinor hesitated, and then said quietly: "As you will. I will at least undertake to go what you call my usual way." And, their paths diverging here, the schoolmistress went on to her home, while the young man returned meditatively to his boarding place.

He was not altogether satisfied with the interview. He could not say, now that it was over, that Miss Austin had manifested any regret that he had failed to see her oftener, nor that her usual composure had seemed to be disturbed by his presence. On the other hand, the sight of her had served to intensify the warm feeling which had already had its birth in his heart, and had strengthened his conviction that, whatever cloud might hang over the Austins, Elinor herself was in no wise under it.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE following morning Robert breakfasted earlier than usual, and immediately afterward called to his dog and started off by a roundabout route, skirting the shore for a while and then striking across country and making his way slowly toward the interior.

It was a glorious morning ; and as the young man swept with his eye the sparkling bosom of the harbor, the picturesque village coming down to its brink, and the green and brown of the inland reaches, he felt that he could pass a lifetime amid these peaceful scenes and never tire, if only one object on which he had set his heart could be attained.

He had thought it all over half of the preceding night, and had weighed everything. He had considered how little he knew of Elinor personally ; how utterly ignorant he was of her family history ; how widely she differed from the ideal he had always had before him ; how many things to which his own mind inclined would perhaps ever remain a closed book to her. He asked himself if it was her beauty that had enthralled him, and he thought he could answer no. He asked himself what in particular drew him towards her and he could not say. He only knew that his soul was filled with a longing to hear her say that she loved him, and then to possess her. It wasn't a

question of antecedents, or intellectual attributes, or social aspirations, or congenial tastes. It was Elinor that he wanted, just as she was ; and he felt that unless that desire of his heart was gratified life could never again be worth the living.

Robert had made a somewhat wide detour while these thoughts in their various amplifications were passing through his mind, but now changing his course he struck into the road which Miss Austin was accustomed to take from the village, and sauntered along at a leisurely pace, counting upon meeting her when perhaps half the journey should have been accomplished.

Walking on, his mind recurred to the matter which was now so all-absorbing, and he commenced reviewing, as he had a hundred times before, all the incidents that had marked their acquaintance.

In vain, however, he tried to discover in her bearing toward him sufficient evidence on which to base a belief that she cared for him. In expressions of gratitude — how he loathed that word ! — on the several occasions of his timely intervention, she had not been wanting ; but no word of hers had yet betrayed a heart interest, and upon her face no sign of agitation had ever appeared, except when stirred by some emotion of which he could not discover himself to be the cause.

Meanwhile half the distance had been covered, and most of the other half was in sight, and no school-mistress had yet appeared. Could she have forgotten it, and gone another way ? Impossible : after the

particular stress he had laid upon her seeming to avoid him, and her own promise to go her usual way, forgetfulness could hardly be pleaded. And yet what other explanation could be offered, unless she had deliberately disappointed him? Perhaps she was ill.

These and a thousand other thoughts crowded through his mind as he continued on his way, until at last the village was reached, and no Elinor.

Hastening around in the direction of the fisherman's cottage his attention was for a moment attracted to the remarkable behavior of little Mehitabel Owen, who was standing in the lane opposite the Austin abode, and going through a series of antics which Robert failed to remember having seen her perform before. First she jumped straight into the air, both feet together and landing in her original tracks. Then she laid violent hands on her face, and inserting her thumbs at the ends of her mouth and her index fingers at the corners of her eyes, produced a most diabolical effect. Then she spat a couple of times, hissed venomously, gave a few short yelps, and wound up the performance with more jumps in the soft mud.

Looking to see for whose edification this singular exhibition was going on, Robert perceived little Jimmie perched in a fence corner, quietly regarding the spectacle with controlled but evident amazement, until his eyes fell upon the new-comer, when he jumped down and ran to meet him.

"Sister gone to school to-day, Jimmie?"

"Yes, sir."

"Went early, I suppose?"

"No, not very. Mr. Smith said if she'd wait he'd give her a ride over. And so she waited."

"Did they go by the short cut?"

"No, they went round by the pond."

"Who is Mr. Smith?"

"Why," wonderingly, "he's Mr. Smith, that's all."

"Yes, but is he an old man like — like Mr. Owen, or a young man, say like me?"

"Oh," cried the boy gleefully, "he is n't a bit like Mr. Owen; he's ever so much younger. But then," confidentially, "he is n't a bit like you, you know, either."

"How is n't he like me, Jimmie?"

"Why," said the child, hesitatingly, "his hands are different, and he don't have any white in his sleeves, and his voice is n't like yours, and he chews tobacco, and he laughs — Oh, so loud!"

"I guess that will do, Jimmie," said Robert, at the close of this exhaustive description. And leaving the boy with a remembrance, and dismissing further consideration of Mr. Smith, he went on discontentedly to the pier and spent the remainder of the forenoon watching a whaler getting under way.

CHAPTER XVII.

DETERMINED to know what it was that had moved Elinor to such utter disregard of her promise, Robert again took the road in the afternoon, this time intending to regulate his progress so as to meet her soon after leaving the school-house — taking Jimmie along as a sort of palliative to what, undertaken for the second time on the same day, might seem a questionable proceeding.

He continued on to the school-house, however, without meeting her, and was about concluding that he had been again outwitted, when he perceived through the uncurtained window a solitary figure still sitting at the teacher's desk. Entering — while Jimmie and the dog raced for a neighboring thicket — he discovered the teacher seated at her table, one hand supporting her head, and an expression of unutterable sadness prevailing over her countenance.

Rising as Robert entered, she stammered out some excuse about having remained to correct some exercises for which she had not had time during school hours.

“But you were not so engaged when I came in,” said Robert, coldly. In spite of himself he could not help wondering if she were thinking of her charioteer of the morning.

"True," she replied, confusedly; "I had allowed my thoughts to wander from my work. But I will bring them back now," at the same taking up a bundle of papers.

"Please not," said Robert, gravely: "at least not until you have told me why you failed to keep your engagement this morning."

"Was it an engagement?"

"It amounted to that."

"I — I did not think of it in that way," stammered the girl. And then, nerving herself to the task of making some plausible explanation of her conduct, she added — "It is not often that I have a chance to ride to school, and I thought you would be glad for me to improve the opportunity." And then she commenced to color again, feeling that somehow she had not bettered matters by assuming that degree of interest on his part.

"If you reasoned in that way," said Robert, discontentedly, "I of course have nothing to say. But did it not occur to you that I might conclude that you had done as you did simply for the pleasure of Mr. Smith's society?"

"Not if you had ever seen him," said Elinor, quietly.

"But suppose you had *known* that I would care: would you have done any differently?"

"How can I tell what I would have done in so improbable a case?" cried the girl, in a voice rendered almost sharp by pain as she recalled the persistent teachings of her father. And then more

composedly — “But what a fuss we are making over a trifle, and how you must be laughing at my earnestness.”

“It may seem a trifle to you,” said Robert, “but I assure you it is not that to me.”

They were standing closely confronting each other as he said this, and he had taken her hand and she had not withdrawn it.

“Elinor,” he continued, speaking with tender earnestness, “ever since I first saw you in your father’s house I have carried you in my heart. Waking or sleeping you have been there, crowding out all other interests, and controlling my life. Either you must be the most unconscious of women, or you must have perceived how I have sought you ; how contented I have been in your presence ; how disturbed I have been when failing to see you as I had anticipated. Have you thought of this at all?”

“Yes, I have thought of it. But I could not know that it was real — that you were sincere.”

“Do you know it now?”

“How can I know it better than before?”

“O Elinor, you must believe it. Can you not see what I know must be written on my face?”

Raising her eyes to meet her lover’s, a crimson wave suffusing her face from throat to brow, and letting her form sway to the touch of the arm that was now about her, the girl made answer — “I do see, and I believe.”

How much further this might have gone, how irrevocably the compact which was sure to carry con-

sternation to the bosom of Mrs. Lynden might then and there have been signed and sealed, can never be known ; for at that moment the door burst open and Jimmie rushed in, breathless from a race across the fields, and curious to know what was keeping his sister and his friend so late that night.

The walk home was a quiet one, and for the most part unmarked by conversation. Jimmie kept close by his sister's side, and all attempts to send him off on expeditions with the dog proved most lamentable failures. Elinor's eyes would now and then sparkle with soft amusement at the total miscarriage of Robert's carefully contrived plans for procuring a further *tête-à-tête* with her, and then her face would resume its wonted gravity, while her lover walked beside her in comparative content.

As they neared the house Jimmie ran on ahead to investigate some matter which seemed to have excited Towser's interest, and Robert seized the opportunity to ask Elinor when he might see her at her home.

The girl hesitated for a moment, just long enough to re-arouse Robert's doubts of the reality of her professed confidence, or of her almost confessed interest in him, and then said : —

"My father has grown somewhat exacting as his health fails, and, though able to take care of himself in the evening as well as daytime, expects me to give him the benefit of my company when at home. But as soon as I can find an evening when he seems willing to do without me — as sometimes

when he goes to his room early — I shall be glad to see you.”

This businesslike statement of the situation, unaccompanied by any expression of regret, struck Robert as being not altogether lover-like, even considering what he had come to characterize as the peculiar temperament of Elinor Austin. Forcing himself to be content with it, however, he then asked by what token he was to know when such a time had come, and received an answer whose practical purpose somewhat revived his drooping spirits :

“You will know by a light which I will place in the upper window, which you can see from the veranda of your boarding place.”

And covering him with a sweep of her eyes which made his heart rejoice, she had disappeared in the house, and he was left to the rapture of his own blissful meditations.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE Ladies' Literary League had been engaged in giving a series of "sociables" for the laudable purpose of replenishing its diminished treasury, and the series was about drawing to a close.

The "sociables" were not a particularly exciting variety of entertainment, but they furnished an opportunity for the gathering together of young people — any of whom could find admission on the payment of a nickel and the promise of good behavior — and there was always a little mild refreshment in the way of chicken or fish "chowder," cake and coffee, with occasionally ice cream; any and all of which were to be had for a money consideration; and at the close there was generally the crowning glory of a general auction, at which such remains of the banquet as were transportable were knocked off to the highest bidder.

The company was by no means confined to young people, but there was always a considerable number of middle-aged housekeepers, whose one delight, and apparently the chief motive of their presence, was an investigation of the cake department.

By an exhaustive interrogation of the committee of arrangements, supplemented by skilfully propounded inquiries addressed to the several salesladies, these

indefatigable women would inform themselves minutely as to the origin of every loaf of cake on exhibition; and then, though their own pantries were bursting with similar products of the culinary art, and though the treasury of the Literary League was a matter as to which they gave themselves little concern, each of those devoted women would provide herself with a carefully identified wedge from every blessed loaf and bear it in triumph to her own house, to be thereafter nibbled and criticised in sundry dining and sitting rooms throughout the town.

The meeting this week was at Mrs. Bearse's — there was a Mr. Bearse, but Mrs. B. was always recognized as the head of the house. Mrs. Bearse was not a member of the League, neither was her daughter. If inquired of by their familiars — at least prior to the time of this particular meeting — they would have tossed their heads and remarked in not very grammatical phrase that they “did n't want nothin' to do with it.”

But Mrs. Bearse was a resolute woman, whose whole existence had thus far been an unremitting struggle to obtain for her family some sort of social recognition in the community. It had been hard work. Handicapped by her own illiteracy and the indifference of her plodding husband, the difficulties of her situation had at times seemed almost insuperable, which even the united efforts of herself and her now grown-up and somewhat more cultivated daughter could hardly avail to overcome. But though often discouraged — a woman with a better

understanding of her own "outs" would have given up the fight — she never faltered but pressed patiently on, unmindful of rebuffs, oblivious to snubs — which her own deficiencies often actually saved her from seeing — looking forward with an eye single to the one hope of her life, a place perhaps half way up the social ladder of the little world about her.

Believing that deeds, if there are only enough of them, may be made to offset the lack of inherent recommendations to favor, Mrs. Bearse made it her business to be active and conspicuous in every good work. A member of the church, she attended diligently on all its appointed ceremonials, and contributed liberally according to her means for the maintenance of its cause. As tender-hearted as the average of women, but not more so, she flew to the relief of the afflicted and distressed as though her life depended on it, and her name was often in the mouth of the people as of one abounding in good works. Particularly was she active in all charitable or otherwise public enterprises where she might find herself associated with the "best people" of the place, and where she might feel, for at least a fleeting moment, that she was on an even footing with the greatest of them.

Her house also was always at the disposal of any for church or charitable gatherings — it was almost pathetic to see how much was expected from this "corralling" of the longed-for society within the domestic walls — and in this way it happened that the Literary League found itself encamped on the

evening in question within the precincts of the Bearse abode. One member of the League had been taken suddenly ill, another was absent, the family of another had been visited by death, the remainder had already served in their turn, and hearing of their dilemma, Mrs. Bearse with characteristic promptness had thrown herself and house into the breach.

All the members of the League heretofore mentioned in these pages were present on this occasion, as well as others not so honored. Miss Guppy, decorated with a new and elaborate chestnut friz-front, was looking more charmingly youthful than ever, and more than ever entitled to rank as one of the "girls." Puss Taber, brim-full of mischief but never malicious, held her little court as usual, irresistible as ever in spite of the admitted fact that not one of her admirers stood the remotest chance as against the handsome parson. Miss Cleveland, elegant and gracious, moved about in her tranquil way, intoxicating her hostess with a brief remark now and again, and filling the daughter with despair of ever attaining to that perfection of aristocratic ease. Miss Hoyt was on hand, ready for a row at the shortest notice—quick-witted and warm-hearted, but full of quills as a hedgehog. Miss Maynard, a modest and prepossessing young lady who had recently brought to her island home the results of years of musical exploration under the best masters of Europe, was present and had good-naturedly consented to pound the piano as re-

quired, and Miss Bellingham, a stately young person with a fondness for the violin, was expected to do duty on that favorite instrument.

All these and many others — including a sprinkling of the middle-aged ladies already mentioned — were present, representing the feminine portion of the community, and together made up, as the county paper remarked on the following day, “a most accomplished and attractive assemblage.” On the other hand the men, as is usual on such occasions, made but a slim showing, a few callow youngsters who seemed nailed to the hallway, and Mr. Clarence Claridge, making up for most of the evening the sum total of the masculine element.

The gentleman named, however, should not be permitted to pass, even at this stage of our history, without some more particular notice than the mere mention of the fact that he was there.

Mr. Claridge was a blonde young man, thirty years of age more or less, who had been graduated as a physician, but had n't condescended to practice very much as yet. He talked quite grandly of matters relating to “the profession,” and how certain methods of proceeding were regarded by that collective body; but as he was in the habit of intimating that the curing of the ordinary ills of ordinary mortals was rather low business for a gentleman, the secret of his delay in getting to work may perhaps be understood.

Mr. Claridge's views of the practice of medicine from a gentlemanly standpoint — which he subse-

quently took occasion to modify — were not the only peculiar notions entertained by him. He attended church with tolerable regularity, but he wanted it distinctly understood that it was not from any special religious bias, but because he considered it a proper example to set before average humanity, and a thing which every gentleman ought to do. He was a member of a political party, but he wanted his friends to take notice that because he chose to associate himself with that party, it did n't follow that he approved of all the acts of his political associates ; indeed, from the frequency of his criticisms, it might fairly be inferred that he considered them generally wrong, and that he was held to a perfunctory allegiance by other considerations than those of political righteousness. With little or no visible means of subsistence, he desired all men to know that he fared sumptuously every day, and talked freely and largely of the best hotels and brands of cigars, and his favorite tailors, and his habits when “in town.”

Nevertheless Mr. Claridge was undeniably well born and fairly well bred, good looking, a companionable associate, popular with the ladies, and — barring his little peculiarities, which harmed nobody — a very good fellow.

This was the assemblage on which Robert, after his customary and so far fruitless survey of the fisherman's cottage from the Owen mansion, accompanied by his friend Sewell, descended at about nine o'clock.

With the entrance of these two gentlemen, a little ripple of excitement ran over the assembled company. Mr. Claridge, who had been entertaining a circle of ladies with a graphic description of exploits in which he had figured at college, suddenly found his auditors losing interest in his narration, and directing their attention towards the new-comers. Miss Taber, who had been paralyzing a couple of bashful lads whom she had surprised in a corner, all at once developed symptoms of fluttering absent-mindedness, and became less and less coherent in her teasing of the boys. Mrs. Bearse and daughter came beaming from the kitchen where they had been giving directions in a matter of general interest, and expressed their unfeigned delight at the presence of this pair of celebrities,—Robert and Sewell both recognizing at a glance the young lady whose virgin hopes had been so plainly depicted on her countenance at the ministerial jubilee in the early summer.

By the time the two gentlemen had greeted their acquaintances, and been presented to those whom they had not met before, the hour for refreshments had arrived, and the first relay of guests repaired to the dining-room, Mr. Sewell taking in Miss Taber, and Robert following with Miss Hoyt. A long table was set in the centre of the room, for the purposes of the chowder, while from another, set in a sort of recess, cake and coffee were dispensed to all who desired to purchase. Behind this table sat three young ladies, and one of them was — Miss Elinor Austin!

How Robert got through the period of refreshment and the remainder of the evening ; how he nerved himself to make relevant replies to Miss Hoyt's light badinage, as she rallied him on his lack of appetite ; how he managed to properly applaud the several instrumental performances and Mr. Claridge's song ; and how, having bade his hostess good night, and performed the duty of seeing a couple of unprotected females to their homes, he at last found himself in his own room at the Owens', need not be particularized here. Suffice it to say that he did get there at last, and, after pacing the floor for half the night, repaired to a couch, which held no sleep for him until day had well nigh dawned.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE morning found Robert in no better frame of mind than on his retirement the night before. A terrible heart-sickness possessed him, over which indignation for a long time vainly tried to get the mastery.

Was the girl entirely without heart? he asked himself again and again. Was she incapable of understanding the consuming passion of which he was the victim? Could it be possible that the mere opportunity of meeting a few people at an evening gathering had counted for more, with her, than the appointment which he had been patiently waiting for her more than a week to keep? Might it be that, in spite of certain advantages of which he felt himself to be possessed, there was some village swain who proved a more congenial companion to her, — like the young man, for instance, whom Jimmie had so vividly described, — and that, when he was not present to plead his own cause, the girl's natural predilections asserted themselves? But then, if she really did n't care for him, why give him that parting look from her eloquent eyes, — a glance that set his heart beating, even now, as he remembered it? Why deliberately make appointments which she even then must have intended not to keep? And so on,

and on, until he had worked himself into a state where resentment had gotten the better of every other emotion, and then he sat down and wrote her a letter.

And this is what he wrote : —

“I have waited until morning, before writing, in order not to act hastily. I still care enough for your good opinion not to have you think of me as behaving like a boy in a huff. I have waited many evenings for the promised signal, believing meanwhile that you withheld it only through the exactions of your father. No signal has rewarded me but, on the very first occasion that offers, I find you enjoying yourself in your own way, utterly regardless of the disappointment which you have caused me. I am not making much of a trifle, but am forced to feel, and bitterly feel, in what different estimation we hold each other. For I know that, on my own part, the company of angels would not have won me from keeping faith with you had the situation been reversed.

“I have tried to think that perhaps you still doubted my sincerity, and, in fear of compromising yourself, had taken the course which has now so often tried me. But I cannot credit it. You must have seen that almost ever since I came to this place I have lived only for you, — and, more than that, in the face of opposition of which you know nothing. And for what? For the sake of one who has consented to be served, who was willing to be worshipped, who has even at times appeared to reciprocate the love lavished upon her, but who I am now convinced has never had one real heart-throb for my sake.

“I did not intend to complain, and I cannot believe, even now, that you are heartless. As I recall all that has passed between us, — as I feel again the sweet presence that seemed to bring heaven to me while it was near, — I cannot altogether disbelieve in the true womanliness that always impressed me so strongly. It may not be a lack of capacity for loving, but that I have failed to sound its depths. Some other man will doubtless do that, and you will be happy in your own way. Good by and God bless you.”

This epistle, in which love, chagrin and pain seemed mingled in about equal proportions, Robert hastily sealed and dispatched, without giving himself time to repent of his action.

It was now his intention to bring his vacation to a close at once — that is, as soon as it could be properly managed so that his departure should not look like a flight. Moreover there were many agreeable acquaintances among the townspeople whom he could not leave without a word of farewell, so that two or three days at least must elapse before they could break up.

Full of these thoughts his mind naturally turned to the water, on which so much of his time had been passed, and as it was a fine day he strolled down to the pier, thinking that if he should chance to fall in with an outward-bound boatman, he would take one more sail before returning to the city, which would henceforth be his home.

As he neared the landing he could scarce repress an exclamation of surprise at seeing Capt. Austin, leaning somewhat heavily on his stick, but looking better than he had ever expected to see him again.

He seemed embarrassed as Robert approached, but returned the latter's courteous salutation with this remark : —

“It may surprise you to see me here ; but the day is so fine, and I am feeling so much stronger than usual, that I prevailed upon my daughter — who has grown somewhat tyrannical of late — to permit me to come down and look at my boat.”

“Then you still retain possession of your craft,” said Robert, looking toward the boat which lay at her accustomed moorings.

“Yes, the season was so nearly spent when my health began to fail that her owner didn’t think it worth while to make any different arrangement for the present. And besides,” added the fisherman, with a pathetic smile, “it was possible that I would regain my health, and be able to run her as before.”

“Indeed, I hope you will,” said Robert, earnestly, his momentary resentment against the old man vanishing at sight of his weakness.

“Thank you for your kind wishes,” replied Austin ; “but I know now that that can never be. However,” he added, more cheerfully, “I am going to make the most of the strength which this bright day has brought me, and if I can get anybody to lend a hand will take a turn out by the light.”

Robert was thunderstruck at this proposition. It seemed to him like flying in the face of Providence for this tottering old man to think of venturing out on the water, even with a competent hand to aid him — which he knew could hardly be had, as the boatmen were out almost to a man. How to remonstrate without incurring the fisherman’s displeasure, however, was a question not so easily answered. At length he said, speaking with evident embarrassment : —

“Do you think your daughter would approve of such an excursion, when you have been so ill and must still be so weak ?”

"My daughter is not yet the director of my movements altogether," replied Capt. Austin, coldly; "and if she were would probably not object to my taking a short sail on such a day as this, any more than to my riding in a carriage if I had one. I shall take a man along if I can find one, or even a boy who will follow my instructions will answer."

Robert debated within himself. "It is preposterous for him to think of such a thing, and I ought not to countenance it. But how to prevent it? I can't go and warn Miss Austin myself, though that does n't matter, for before I or any messenger would have time to reach her at her school he may have taken some bare-legged boy into his boat and started off to almost certain destruction. Rather than leave him to do that I had better offer my own services, and make the trip as short as possible. And yet my heart misgives me." Then turning to his companion he said aloud:—

"If you will accept my poor services I shall be happy to ship under you, and will do my best to follow your direction."

"If you are willing to go," said Capt. Austin, "I will gladly resign the boat to your control. I am told that you have become a skilful boatman."

"I will do my best," replied Robert, smilingly. And so saying he aided the old man into the boat, and having cast off and hoisted sail they were soon on their way out of the harbor.

For a time nothing was said by either. The elder man was drinking in the delights of wind, and sun,

and sea, to which for so many days he had been a stranger, while the younger, with hand abstractedly guiding their course was wrapped in his own bitter reflections. And so they sailed on, through a fleet of coastwise schooners lying at anchor, past a revenue cutter just making port, past the headlands guarding the entrance to the harbor, past the steamer making her regular trip up from Nantucket, until at last they found themselves well out in the open sound.

Meanwhile the freshening breeze, and the rush of the water surging away on either side of the cleaving bow, seemed to have acted upon the feeble fisherman like a tonic, and by his kindling eye and more alert attitude Robert could perceive a return of something of his old "joy of the sea."

But he was not prepared for what presently transpired. Seeing that for some reason the sail did not set exactly as it should, before Robert could prevent him Capt. Austin had risen from his seat nearly amidship and started forward. He had not taken three steps, however, before a sudden giddiness seized him, and swaying an instant he shot over the side and plunged head first into the water.

The wind was now blowing a fair breeze dead astern, and the tide was about slack. Believing after an instant's calculation that he could not bring the boat about in time to be of any use, Robert sprang forward with lightning quickness and let go the anchor, and in another instant had thrown off his coat and jumped overboard.

The fisherman's plunge had revived him, and with his little remaining strength he managed to keep above water until Robert reached him, though in another moment he must have succumbed to exhaustion.

"Hold on to my shoulders," cried Robert, "and we will make our way back to the boat. Keep up good heart. It will be slow work, but we shall get there."

And it was slow work. More than once, as he labored painfully on, dragged down by the weight of two men freighted with their wet clothes, Robert felt as though he must give up the fight, and they must drown together. "Little loss," he said to himself. "This old man must soon die anyhow, and as for me I don't know as there is anything particular to live for, young as I am." And then he thought of the mother waiting for him at home, the light of whose life would go out in darkness if he failed to return, and he nerved himself to continue the struggle.

Only once did the fisherman speak, and then he uttered words to which the swimmer paid little heed at the time, but which he afterward recalled and wondered what might be their significance. Perceiving how painfully Robert was laboring he said huskily in his ear: "It's no use — let me go — Jimmie — he's my grandson — my grandson — help him if you can": and would have let go his hold. But Robert cried out to him with such a terrible voice to hold on that he obeyed.

At last, however, more dead than alive, they

reached the boat, into which Robert, with his hand grasping Austin's coat, managed to scramble, and then with infinite labor, and with little help from the latter, succeeded in getting the old man in.

Then, having first covered his companion with his coat and with such other dry material as he found in the locker, and having compelled him to drink a little brandy which he chanced to have with him, Robert hastily got in his anchor and bore away for home.

Reaching the landing after a quick run, the wind having hauled to another quarter, he secured the boat without delay, and hailing a passing carriage conveyed his charge to his home, where he made him as comfortable as possible — Elinor had not yet returned from school — and then hastened to his boarding place, whence Mrs. Owen and the maid at once sallied forth to look after the sick man.

CHAPTER XX.

EVERYTHING was done for Capt. Austin — Robert having so directed — that money and attention could accomplish, but to no purpose. The exposure and exhaustion incident to the day's experiences had brought about a relapse, and a return of his old malady in aggravated form, and in less than a week he was laid to rest in the village burial ground, and his daughter and Jimmie were left alone.

And they were sincere mourners. The child, not so much perhaps, because he *was* a child; but to Elinor the loss of the only human being to whom she had been accustomed to look up, seemed irreparable. Stern though he was by nature, and self-absorbed in his later years, she had loved him with all the filial strength of her nature, and his growing helplessness and dependence upon her had only intensified her affection. Now he was gone, and the boy was all that was left that she could call her own — at least that was the way it seemed to her until other events came in to turn the current of her thoughts.

Meanwhile, Robert knew nothing of what was transpiring at the Austin house, or of the change that had taken place there. The terrible ordeal through which he had passed on that fateful day, his superhuman exertions in the water and the time that

elapsed before he could change his wet clothing, brought on chills and fever ; and when he retired to his bed that night it was to remain there for many a weary day.

Long and violently the fever raged. Day after day saw no improvement, and the heart of the faithful mother sank within her as she saw her boy wasting with disease and his strength diminishing with each succeeding sun. Over and over he lived the experiences of that dreadful day — struggling in the water, dragging himself into the boat, and agonizing as he labored to pull the fisherman in after him. Then again the scene would change and he would reach out his hands and call for Elinor, with a yearning in his face and a wistful look in his eyes that would have melted a stone. Always when not in the boat that name would recur, again and again with that look of longing entreaty. The hired nurse took no notice of it, and Mrs. Lynden — who had never heard Miss Austin's christian name, and to whom Robert had not mentioned the girl at all since their conversation heretofore recorded — assumed that it was his old love whom he had in mind (though addressing her in an unfamiliar way), and that he was living over the life when she was the idol of his heart. But one day he spoke the full name — “Elinor Austin” — and then the mother awoke to the true state of her son's heart, and to an understanding of what was preying upon his unsettled mind.

Even then she could not bring herself to be governed by it. All the considerations which she had

urged upon her son's attention with such earnestness — and in part with such irresistible logic — occurred to her, and she could not make up her mind to expose him further, and under such perilous circumstances, to the danger from which she supposed he had escaped and from which she now feared so much. He would get well — he must get well — and then they would leave this place to which she now wished they had never come, and in other scenes he would forget his infatuation, and be guided by the social considerations and standards which she believed to be of paramount importance. That he, the son who had never crossed her in any particular, would deliberately persist in following the dictates of his own heart against her wishes, never for a moment entered her mind.

But at last she could stand it no longer. His incessant cries for that one name, and the dumb entreaty in the worn face, were more than she could bear. And so, taking Mrs. Owen into her confidence, she obtained an interview with Miss Austin, and stated the case exactly as it stood.

She told her that she believed her son's life depended upon the request she had come to proffer being granted. She frankly admitted that it was distasteful to her. After one look at Elinor she forbore to express the hope that no advantage would be taken of it, but threw herself upon Miss Austin's generosity to grant this favor in which she believed was involved her son's recovery.

The result was that after a few minutes consideration Elinor coldly announced her willingness to

undertake this novel mission, and the interview closed. The substitute teacher, procured during Capt. Austin's last illness, was continued, and on the following day Miss Austin was installed at the Owen mansion.

Her position was a singular one. A comfortable room had been fitted up for her reception, where she passed most of her time, subject to call when needed. As often as the paroxysm of delirium recurred Elinor would be summoned and would take her place by the bedside. No sooner had she taken the sick man's hand in hers, and placed another cool hand upon his burning brow, than a look of ineffable content overspread his countenance, his eyes would close, and the deep sleep of physical and mental exhaustion would speedily follow. Then she would rise and pass noiselessly from the room.

From this time on, the patient slowly but steadily improved, and at the end of a week the fever had turned and the doctor announced that there would be no recurrence of delirium.

Mrs. Lynden thereupon sought Miss Austin to acquaint her with the situation and inform her as delicately as possible that her services were no longer necessary ; but discovered to her surprise that that young lady had already learned the fact from the doctor, and bidding Mrs. Owen a hasty adieu had left the house. There remained no alternative but to follow her, which she did on the following day.

To say that Mrs. Lynden dreaded this second interview is putting it very mildly indeed. The royal

bearing of this young person, both at their first meeting and in their occasional encounters at Mrs. Owen's, had impressed her very strongly, and a kind of awe had taken the place of her former attitude of disparagement — which, while it by no means reconciled her to the girl as a prospective daughter-in-law, filled her with dismay at the thought of meeting her again for a final settlement. But she was not a woman to shrink from her duty, and so she repaired to the fisherman's cottage with her mind braced to meet whatever might befall.

Her tap at the door was answered by Elinor herself, who flushed a little at first, but evincing no other signs of disturbance ushered her visitor into the little parlor. As the latter entered she caught a glimpse of Jimmie.

"What a lovely little boy!" And then, gently — "He must be dearer than ever to you now."

"Yes, Jimmie and I are all in all to each other since his — since my father died."

Mrs. Lynden noted the hesitation, and the warm feeling which the circumstances of the last few days had tended to quicken in her heart toward Elinor was instantly chilled. After an embarrassing pause —

"I have come, Miss Austin, to make the feeble acknowledgment of your invaluable services which your sudden departure prevented me making at home."

Mrs. Lynden realized that this was rather a stately form of address to employ to a young lady who had probably just saved her son's life; but to save her

own she did n't know how to better it, without backing down and out from the position she had taken and the course she had intended to pursue.

"There was no need," replied Elinor, quietly. "The place" — she smiled with just a suspicion of bitterness as she used the word — "was an easy one, and your offer to settle with the substitute teacher relieves you from all obligation."

"But I cannot consent to view what you have done for us simply as so much service rendered for so much money," cried Mrs. Lynden, in genuine distress.

"Pardon me, then, if I ask how you intend to view it," questioned the girl, the proud face giving no hint of the tempest raging within.

Mrs. Lynden, driven to the wall by this straightforward assault, saw no alternative but to capitulate at once and confess her real purpose.

"What I meant was," she went on confusedly, "that it was not a service that could be measured by the ordinary standards — so much labor for so much money, or so many days at so much a day — but was entitled to a recompense that could only be limited by the ability of the beneficiary to render it."

"In money?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Lynden, desperately; "in money."

"Then," retorted Elinor, her eyes flashing and bosom heaving as she rose from her seat, "it is needless to prolong this interview further. Consider that you have made me the most liberal offer that your

wealth will warrant, and that the same is duly appreciated, but has been respectfully declined."

Mrs. Lynden was nonplussed. Cultured woman that she was, and with some experience in the ways of the social world, she was compelled to admit that this comparatively untutored girl who stood defiantly there had put her to shame in this passage at arms, and remained in triumphant possession of the field. But there was no retreating from the path that she had marked out for herself without giving up everything. And so, addressing herself once more to Elinor, and formulating a few phrases expressive of her sense of indebtedness and of her desire to do something now or hereafter in recognition of it, Mrs. Lynden retreated in as good order as could be expected under the circumstances.

Left alone, Elinor first solaced herself with the feminine luxury of a burst of tears. Then swiftly reviewing the scene which had just been enacted, she was covered with confusion as the question arose in her mind, "What could his mother have thought was my motive in pressing her so, as to the kind of compensation she expected to bestow? Would n't she naturally suspect I was trying to draw her out with reference to her son's interest in me? And yet nothing could be further from the truth. I was only determined she should declare her true purpose at once, and so save useless circumlocution. I don't care anything about her — and I am not sure that I do for anybody but Jimmie; but I can't endure that anybody should think that I would descend to such

an unwomanly proceeding as my conduct must have appeared to indicate."

As for Mrs. Lynden, nothing of this kind crossed her mind. Her only thought as she took her crest-fallen way homeward, was that if ever there was a plebeian girl who looked a princess of the blood, that girl was Elinor Austin.

CHAPTER XXI.

"MOTHER," said Robert one morning soon after the interview just recorded, and when he had so far convalesced as to be permitted to converse at will: "Who watched with me while I was so very sick?"

"There were several of us, first and last," replied Mrs. Lynden smilingly. "Sometimes your mother, sometimes the nurse, again, perhaps, Mrs. Owen, or others who might happen to volunteer for the relief of any. You never lacked for care, my son, and have cause to be grateful for the kind interest your friends took in your case."

"I realize it. But mother, were n't there any others than those you have named, and besides people who are in the habit of coming here?"

"Yes, Mr. Sewell sat with you one or two evenings, when the fever was at its height, and when you failed to recognize anybody."

"That was kind of Sewell. But, mother," persisted the invalid, "were n't there others — was n't there any woman or girl whom you have n't named?"

Mrs. Lynden could n't bring herself to tell a deliberate lie, but she dreaded the effect upon her son of a plain statement of the truth.

"There may have been others," she said, guardedly. "You know I could not be always near you."

Robert had unbounded confidence in his mother, and would not have believed it possible that she could deceive him, even in the minutest particular. And so he refrained from further questioning, and continued : —

“Perhaps it was in my dreams, but there were times when I seemed overwhelmed by the multitude of images that passed before me, and the thick-coming fancies that crowded my brain. Sometimes scenes of unutterable horror, again a terrible struggle for life against frightful odds, or still again a recurrence of the earlier experiences of my life of which you know, and of the later ones with which you are less familiar. And then when it seemed that my brain would burst under the intolerable strain, and that I must cry out in my agony, there would seem to be a shadowy presence glide noiselessly up to my bedside, and a cool and gentle touch would be laid upon my forehead, and then all at once the frightful images would vanish, the exhausting struggles would cease, and in their place come tranquillity. And then, mother, — and this is the strangest thing about it, and you must bear with me if I tell you, — I would fall into a deep sleep and dream that Elinor Austin sat by my bedside, holding my hand in hers. Always she came to me in my dreams ; in the sleep that followed the advent of the ministering spirit of whom I have just told you, she and no other — and I would awaken with the sense of her presence so strong upon me that it was hard to believe she had not been actually there.”

"There is no accounting for what one sees in dreams," said Mrs. Lynden carelessly; "especially when falling asleep after the exhaustion of delirium. And now let us talk of something else. The doctor thinks that by the end of another week, if nothing unforeseen occurs, you will be able to make the journey home."

"Very well," said Robert, wearily.

He had not yet become strong enough to take a very lively interest in anything past, present, or to come; and now that he had decided—as he had after the party at Mrs. Bearse's—that there could be nothing further between Miss Austin and himself, there seemed to be no motive for delaying their departure a single day longer than was necessary. He realized also that if he waited until he was fully recovered and able to walk about town, he would feel obliged to call upon a number of friends and acquaintances, with whom he would be compelled to go over the whole history of his adventures in the boat and subsequent illness, and this he knew would be only a weariness to the flesh. And so there seemed to him no reason for opposing his mother's desire for as speedy a departure from the Vineyard as possible.

And accordingly, one pleasant morning about a week later, Robert Lynden and his mother bade adieu to the island village where they had sojourned for nearly half a year, and in the evening of the same day found themselves once more at their own home.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE events which had transpired since the sailing excursion which had had so tragical an ending had, for the time being, crowded out of the mind of the most conspicuous figure in that day's history all recollection of the minor occurrences incident to the mishap itself.

Now, however, as his strength returned and his mind became less occupied with himself and his own condition, Robert found his thoughts recurring to what the old man had said to him, while they were in the water, about Jimmie,—his appeal for help for the little boy.

At first, his only thought was a query as to whether or not it was incumbent upon him to take any notice of the fisherman's request. There was no point of view from which it could be argued that the boy had any claim upon him, and it seemed highly quixotic for him to think of burdening himself with the care and education of one who was bound to him neither by ties of kinship nor by any possible application of the logic of events.

Still, he could not help feeling his heart warm toward the bright little fellow, left so early orphaned, and with so precarious a dependence for the future. First the mother, taken before the baby boy had

learned to know the mother love; and now the father, gone to his account after commending to his care his twice orphaned son.

“Son!” It suddenly flashed across his mind that the old man had said “grandson”—had even uttered it twice during that struggle in the water, when he believed his hour had come. What could be the meaning of that new title? Had the old man, with death looking him in the face, felt that the time had come for throwing off all disguises, and proclaiming the truth for the benefit of whom it might concern? And if so, and the fisherman was in possession of his senses, and had then for the first time stated the true relationship which subsisted between himself and the boy, what dark passage in the life of somebody did it betoken? And then, by a sudden transition, he recalled the Englishman's interest in the child, and his careful inquiries as to the boy's parentage, and then, finally, his despairing question as to whether there appeared to be any concealment, or anything mysterious or unaccountable about the family. Was it possible that, if Fairfax had not been thrown off by the honest but possibly mistaken answers to his questions, the end of his long and unhappy quest might have been found in this apparently humble household?

The more he pondered upon it the more impressed he became with the conviction that something ought to be done to remedy whatever error, if any, he had permitted the Englishman to fall into by wrongful answers to his inquiries. There was the strong

resemblance to his lost wife, which had at first attracted Fairfax's attention, and there was the fact of the coming of this family from New York, at about the time Fairfax lost them there, — the father a seaman, accompanied by two daughters, or at least two young women, one of whom was a mother. Surely here was ample material for constructing a very plausible theory connecting Jimmie's dead mother with the wife of the bereaved Englishman.

Dreading, however, to arouse hopes which might only be blasted upon investigation, Robert decided, — though sorely against his will, — to first write to Miss Austin, with a view to obtaining some possible admission from her which might aid him in deciding whether or not it was expedient to communicate with Fairfax.

Accordingly, the next mail carried to Elinor a cold but courteous note, alluding to her father's appeal to him in the boy's behalf, signifying his desire to carry into effect, as far as he was able, Capt. Austin's wishes, and asking her to indicate in what way he might, — with due deference to her own plans, — be most useful to the child. He also alluded to the relationship which Capt. Austin had recognized, in speaking of the child, and suggested that it might be desirable now, for the boy's own sake, that his true name and position should be understood.

In a few days Robert received from Elinor a brief note equally cool and businesslike with his own, thanking him for the interest he had manifested in

Jimmie, but expressing the hope that she should be able to take care of the boy unaided, and gratefully declining the offer of assistance. Capt. Austin's allusion to the child as his grandson she dismissed with the simple comment that her father was probably not in his right mind when he spoke.

Somewhat rebuffed by the tone of absolute unconcern which characterized this letter, Robert was for a time undecided whether to regard it as evidence that Miss Austin knew of nothing that would explain the grandson theory — which, considering her age, would seem to indicate that there was nothing to know and further inquiry would be useless — or that pride, or a misapprehension of facts, or both, had persuaded her to retain within her own breast whatever knowledge she had. His final decision, however, was to send to Mr. Fairfax a simple statement of the facts, without suggestion or advice, and leave him to act upon it or not as he saw fit. Accordingly, on the following day he despatched a note to the Englishman's address in New York, and a similar one to a London address which the latter had given him, and then turned his attention to other matters until an answer to his communication should be received.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE Literary League is again in session at Mrs. Bearse's — this time “as of right,” that worthy lady having at last succeeded in procuring for her daughter an election to membership in the sacred circle. The talk is of a coming entertainment in the village hall.

“I am trying to decide,” says the mature Miss Guppy, with drooping eyelids, “whether we girls ought to patronize it.”

“Why should n't we?” fires up Miss Hoyt, ready mad.

“Why, to be sure?” echoes most of the others.

“Have n't you heard?” faintly articulates the first speaker, resting her fan on her virgin bosom, and with eyes still on the floor.

“No — what?” — all in chorus.

“You know the name of the play, don't you?” asks Miss Guppy, roused to unusual animation by the extraordinary dulness of her hearers.

“Yes, — ‘The Castaway.’”

“Well, do you know who has volunteered to take the part of the deserted wife?”

“No !” — in concert.

“Elinor Austin ; with that little tow-headed young one she calls her brother, for the child !”

A dead silence, broken only by an expression of

perfunctory dismay from Miss Bearse, rested on the little company for a moment, and then Miss Hoyt to the rescue : —

“ Well, what of it ? ”

“ Oh, nothing,” sighed Miss Guppy, despairingly, with what was meant for a very expressive wave of the hand.

“ Will you tell us,” pursued her tormentor, “ precisely why Elinor Austin is n't at liberty to do exactly the things that any one of us here can do, and without exposing herself to criticism ? ”

“ You can hardly expect me to go into details,” replied Miss Guppy, with eyes upraised in maidenly protestation ; “ but I will say this : that for a person situated as I have tried, with all possible delicacy, to indicate that she is, the airs she gives herself are simply outrageous.”

“ Airs ? ” inquired Dorothy Cleveland, languidly, and in a tone that the little Bearse would have bartered her soul to acquire.

“ Yes, airs,” snapped Miss Guppy, now thoroughly aroused. “ It was only yesterday that I met her on the street with that young cub with her as usual, and I stopped to say to her that if she called at my sister's she could get some clothing that her own boy had cast off. She thanked me civilly enough in words, but informed me frigidly that Jimmie already had sufficient clothing, and the look she gave me as she passed on was enough to freeze your very soul.”

“ Was n't you hoppin' ? ” cried Miss Bearse, interestedly. Before Miss Guppy had an opportunity

to say whether or not she was in the saltatory state of mind so elegantly indicated by the last speaker, Miss Taber interposed — very gravely for her :—

“Are n’t we making a little free with one occupying the position Miss Austin holds? It seems to me if she was n’t a proper person, the school committee would hardly have made her a teacher of one of our schools.”

But Miss Guppy was n’t to be put off so easily.

“It is n’t so certain that she was appointed upon her merits, moral or intellectual. If somebody had n’t had interest with the committee it’s doubtful if she would even have been thought of.”

“If you mean Mr. Lynden,” said Miss Taber, warmly, “I don’t believe a word of it — or, if he did interest himself, that it was with any other motive than to aid a needy and deserving person. George — Mr. Sewell knows him well, and declares that he is the very soul of honor.”

“Out upon this George,” cried the spinster rudely, though with professed pleasantry. “He makes me tired.”

How much further all present might have become involved in the discussion can never be known ; for at that moment the signal was given for the literary feast to commence, and conversation ceased.

When the evening appointed for the “entertainment” arrived, the whole membership of the Literary League was present and so were two people whose attendance had not been counted on. At the conclusion of the last act of the drama two gentlemen

entered the hall, and took up a position in rear of the seats and in the shadow of an overhanging gallery.

As the curtain rose on the repetition of the closing tableau, and Elinor Austin stood before that breathless company, radiant in rich attire and with the velvet-clad, golden-haired Jimmie at her side, a sudden exclamation that was almost a cry burst from the elder man's lips.

"That is my wife's sister, and there stands my boy!" said John Fairfax, trembling like a leaf.

"God grant you may not be mistaken," said Robert Lynden, fervently.

And without waiting for the breaking up of the assemblage, or attracting the attention of any to whom either of them was known, the two men hurried from the hall.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ROBERT'S note to Fairfax's London address had happily reached that gentleman after but a brief delay ; and losing no time he had taken the first steamer for New York, proceeding immediately thence to his friend's home.

Silencing Robert's deprecatory talk about having perhaps brought him over on a wild-goose expedition and at an inclement season of the year, by assuring him that he would never have forgiven him had he done differently, Mr. Fairfax then proceeded to entreat of his friend one more favor — that he would accompany him to the Vineyard on his tour of investigation.

In vain the young lawyer protested business engagements — the needlessness of his going along — a half dozen other petty excuses. His real objection, his dread of meeting Elinor, he could not mention ; and so finding one pretext after another disposed of, he was compelled at last to accord a reluctant assent.

They started the following morning, Fairfax's impatience brooking no further delay, and reached the Vineyard the following afternoon ; but having gone "below" for the passage over, and having arranged to land at Oak Bluffs as in summer, they

were obliged to take carriage for Exham, where they arrived in the evening.

It was too late to commence the prosecution of their inquiry that night, and supper having been disposed of and a few cigars smoked, there still remained a portion of the evening that was likely to hang heavy upon their hands : and so, as the night was fine, Robert proposed a stroll about the village.

This was agreed to, and the two friends had about completed their ramble and were returning to their hotel, when Robert perceived that the hall which they were passing was brilliantly lighted, and suggested their going in, which they did, with the result already narrated.

On reaching the hotel a serious consultation took place between the two friends in Fairfax's room. The Englishman had not been so overcome by the knowledge that his wife was no longer living as might have been anticipated ; because the very statement of facts which had brought him to the Island for the third time involved the death of the wife and mother, and during all his ocean journey he had been accustoming himself to the relinquishment of that fond hope, and trying to solace himself with the thought that at least his boy was left to comfort him. That the child to whom he had first been so strongly attracted was his own he had no longer any doubt.

"I am as certain that I saw my wife's sister this evening," said he, earnestly, "as that I am talking to you now. True she has grown a trifle fuller-figured

and more womanly in the six or seven years since I saw her last, but her face — like her sister's and yet unlike — is one that does not alter very much in a few years, and is not easily forgotten."

Robert felt that his heart echoed this last sentiment; but he only repeated the expression of his hope the night before, that his friend might not be in error.

"I must see her by appointment to-morrow," continued Fairfax; "and you must accompany me, to introduce me, and explain such papers as it may be necessary for me to show. You have her confidence no doubt, and being also a lawyer, will be of incalculable assistance in convincing her of my identity — though that she will hardly question — and of my true relations to her sister, which she may not so readily credit."

And now Robert felt that he could go no further, and, as the easiest way out of his dilemma, concluded to make a clean breast of it and inform the Englishman of his unhappy passion for Miss Austin, and of all that had passed between them.

To his surprise, however, Fairfax took an entirely different view of the situation from what he had expected.

"You say there has n't been anybody else?"

"I have no reason to think there is anybody," replied Robert.

"But that her father has prevented her as far as possible from making acquaintances, especially among the men?"

"Yes."

"And that she is a very proud girl?"

"I never knew one more so."

"And yet that there have been occasions when her pride seemed to yield, and she appeared willing for you to think that she cared for you?"

"Yes."

"Depend upon it, my boy," said Fairfax, glowing with interest in his friend's case which had for the moment supplanted his own, "you have mistaken the signs of the times, or rather you have failed to consider the situation in all its bearings. If Miss Austin is anything like her sister, and her conduct has been as you describe, you are both the victims of circumstances which I trust will ere long prove less unkind. Depend upon it, the evil construction which Capt. Austin placed upon my flight with his daughter inspired in Elinor either a doubt of the honorable intentions of all men who might seek the society of women not exactly in their own social sphere, or else a belief that when she had told you (as she must) what she supposed was the truth relative to her sister, you would shrink from an alliance with a family so disgraced."

"Then you don't consider that her behavior was evidence that she only yielded partially to the earnestness of my addresses, and then when left to herself realized that she could never care for me, and so did what she could to discourage further advances?" suggested Robert, thoughtfully.

"No," replied the other promptly. "You have

put your view of the case very ingeniously ; but I have only to say that a girl such as you have described Elinor to be, and as she appears, and with the family traits as I have known them, would never have been guilty of the vacillating conduct you have imputed to her. On the contrary, if she had found that she could not return your affection in kind, she would have told you so, frankly, and ended it there."

"You may be right," said Robert, doubtingly ; "but I am loath to give myself hope again only to meet further disappointment. Still, if you really think my accompanying you on your errand will be of use to you, I will waive further objection and do as you wish. And if by chance the interview shall give us both our heart's desire, two despondent men will be made happier instead of one."

And so saying Robert bade the Englishman good night and retired to his own room, to wear away the hours in every way but sleep.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE brief note which Robert had despatched, conveyed to Elinor only the information that he would call on her at an hour named, and bring with him a friend who desired to see her concerning a matter of interest to them both.

What that "matter" might be she had no means of divining, and everything but the truth was revolved in her mind and rejected in turn. The idea that Jimmie's father might appear from England to claim his boy never for a moment occurred to her, and if it had would hardly have been entertained for obvious reasons.

But that Robert was coming, the man whom she had schooled herself to believe she should never see again, was a fact that admitted of no question and rested upon no surmise. The man whose person she had succeeded in banishing from her presence, but whose image she had in vain striven to efface from her heart, was coming again, would sit in that room, would hold her hand for a moment, would speak to her in the tones she remembered so well. Was she glad? She hardly knew. Over and over she reviewed the arguments which had convinced her that under the circumstances there

could be no happiness for her in her love, and again and again she told herself that nothing had changed in the brief interval since last he was there. Still, the feeling that the day might have some joy in store for her was strong upon her, and it was with a lighter heart than she had known for many a weary week, that she went about her usual morning avocations, and gave Jimmie his goodby kiss before sending him off to play.

At the appointed hour Robert and Fairfax made their appearance, and were ushered in by a little maid who was temporarily assisting about the housework.

Elinor crimsoned and then turned deathly pale as her eyes rested once more upon her lover, but the commonplaces of greeting which her stammering tongue almost refused to utter were lost in the cry of amazement with which she turned to the other man as Robert introduced his friend.

"You here!" she exclaimed. "And for what?"

"To claim all that is left to me of her who was once my wife," said Fairfax, sadly, at the same time drawing a paper from his pocket.

"Your wife?" almost shrieked the girl. "Is it possible that my father was mistaken, and that all these years of privation and disgrace need never have been?"

"It is even so, as you will see by this certificate of our marriage, which has never been out of my possession, and which Mr. Lynden will assure you is duly certified by the proper authority."

"But your desertion of my sister in Italy," pursued Elinor, still but half convinced.

"I will explain to you," said Fairfax. And then followed a recital of the facts of his capture and ultimate escape, and of his subsequent fruitless wanderings in search of his wife and child, — to all of which Elinor listened with breathless interest, while Robert watched the color come and go on the fair face of his beloved, and wondered what influence, if any, this new disclosure would have upon his own fortunes.

"And now," concluded Fairfax, his story ended, "I have come to claim my boy, trusting to find in him — he has his mother's face — some compensation for the loss of her who has been my star of hope through all these weary years."

Jimmie coming in at this juncture, Robert excused himself and made his way back to the hotel, leaving the three to consider their mutual relations, and the boy to make the acquaintance of his new-found father, without the embarrassing presence of an indifferent person.

And yet, was he an "indifferent person?" That was the question that occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else during the hours that elapsed before Fairfax's return; and when at last that gentleman reappeared and suggested that as Mr. Lynden had taken a somewhat abrupt leave of Miss Austin in the morning, perhaps he ought to make amends by a more formal farewell in the evening, Robert had already arrived at the conclusion that he owed it to

himself to once more try his luck under the changed conditions.

He found Elinor apparently expecting him, dressed simply and becomingly, and it seemed to him that she had never looked so beautiful. But there was the same lack of self-consciousness as of old, and the soft glance of the eye, the rising flush, and the tender curves about the mouth, that had led him to hope on one or two occasions before.

"Elinor," he said at once, "it has been hard for me to come, but I could not stay away. The same fate that sent me to the court room, and also let me save Jimmie, forced me hither. I seem to think of nothing but that sunny afternoon in the school-room, when Jimmie interrupted us and"—

"Sunny?" murmured Elinor, dreamily and irrelevantly.

"Well, sunny at least to me in memory, and as I then believed, to you. It was bright and beautiful to us both then. Do not deny it. You said you 'believed.' O Elinor, believe again. You did not stop loving me right away?"

"No."

"Have you not loved me since?"

No answer, but in the silence a lovely face upturned, and a glad surrender, after the many cruel days of sorrow, to the arms that opened and offered rest.

.

"And now tell me," with man's consistent unreasonableness, "what made you behave so absurdly all along?"

Then she told him that she believed she had loved him from the very first time he called at the house ; how at first it had seemed to shed a new light upon her life, and his apparent regard for her had created a great gladness in her heart until reminded by her father of the cloud that hung over them, and until she had convinced herself, by her father's argument and her own, that no man valuing his social position would seek her in honorable marriage, or would adhere to his intention after having learned from her what she believed to be the truth. And so she had tried to stifle the love that filled her heart, and though now and again yielding in his presence to an impulse which would not be controlled, had, when free from his immediate influence interposed every possible discouragement in his way, even at the risk of seeming guilty of most inexcusable behavior. Now that what she had supposed was a terrible truth had proved to be only a lamentable mistake, she felt at liberty to confess her love and accept the gift which heaven had offered her.

This recital — submitted hesitatingly, and with many blushes — had been properly punctuated here and there as occasion seemed to justify, and now, at its conclusion, was duly sealed with the great seal.

Capt. Austin's device of representing his dying daughter as his wife and so forestalling inquiries as to Jimmie's paternity — and which was also effectual for a time in diverting Fairfax from the prosecution of his search in that quarter — has been sufficiently explained as the facts have developed. The adoption

of his middle name for his first may be here mentioned, and but little then remains to be told to complete this veracious history.

At a council held at the hotel that night it was agreed that all should start on the next day but one for Robert's home, where as soon as practicable the wedding should take place, and whence the whole party should then sail for England — thus furnishing a bridal trip for the newly wedded pair, and giving Jimmie an opportunity to become acquainted with his natural guardian and new-found friends before being separated from her who had been a mother to him through all the years.

And so, Elinor having consented, this programme was duly carried out — the Owens and Mr. Sewell being the only persons entrusted with the secret — and on the day appointed the little company took the boat from Exham for New Bedford, leaving Mr. Owen to make such disposition as he should see fit of Miss Austin's worldly possessions.


Two weeks later a quiet wedding took place at the Lyndens' residence, the Rev. George Sewell officiating, with Mrs. Sewell (*née* Miss Taber) as a guest of honor, and with Mrs. Lynden entirely reconciled to what now appeared to her to be a most desirable alliance; and on the following day this romantically united company sailed for the mother country, where Jimmie found a fond grandmother awaiting him, whose loving ministrations soon reconciled him to the impending separation from all the mother he had known.

Years have passed since the occurrence of the events here narrated, and Robert Lynden is to-day a successful lawyer in Boston, while his lovely and accomplished wife is an acknowledged leader of society in the modern Athens. (They are now neighbors of the Sewells, and Robert takes occasion to inquire of the parson from time to time what are his present views as to where marriages are made.) Twice within that time Fairfax and his son, who is the pride of his father's life, have crossed the ocean to visit them, and one summer since their wedding trip Robert and his wife have passed at the charming home of the Fairfaxes.

But Mrs. Robert has never been able to overcome her repugnance to revisiting the scenes of her girlish sufferings. Her father's remains now repose in the Lynden burial lot, so that the Vineyard has never since numbered the happy pair among its summer sojourners.

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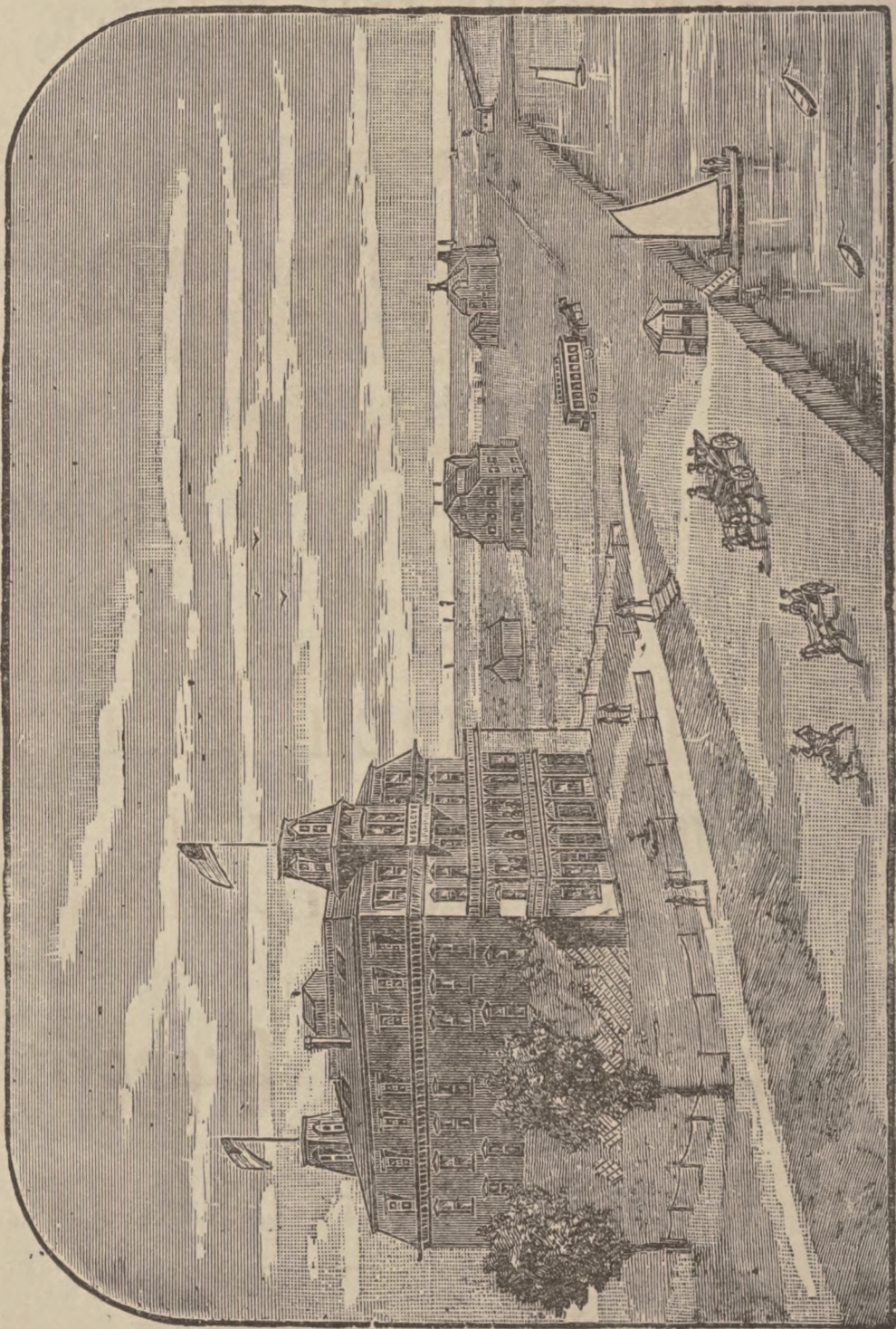
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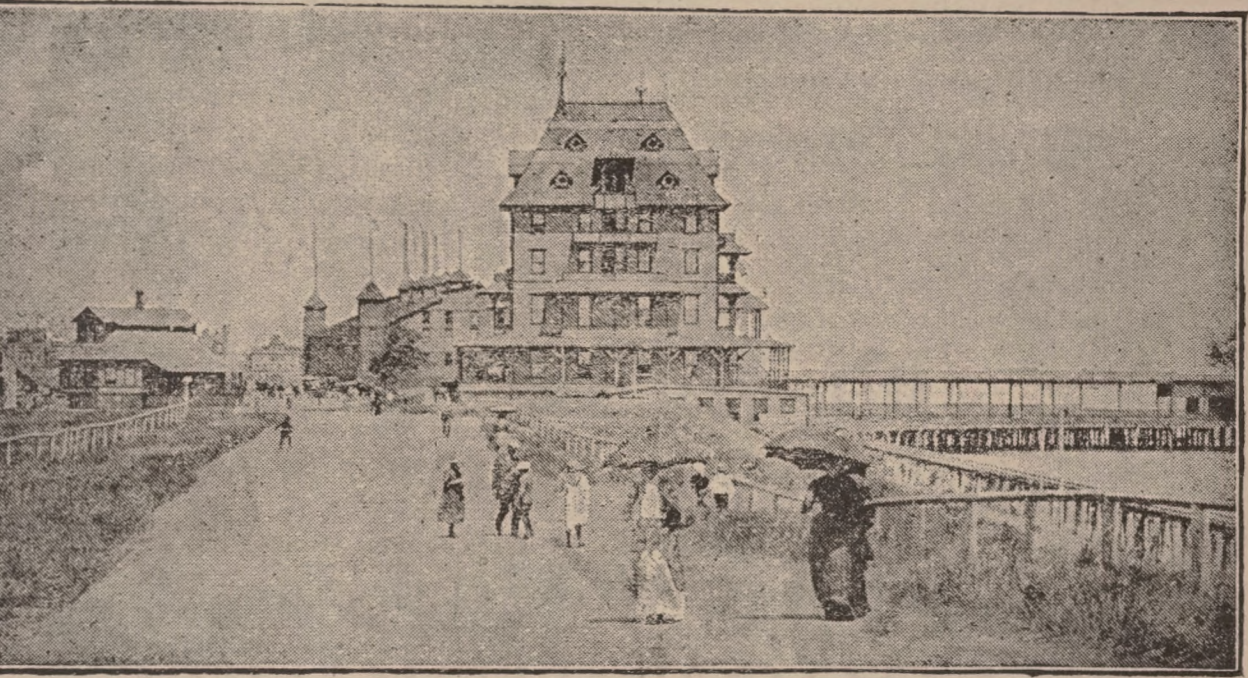
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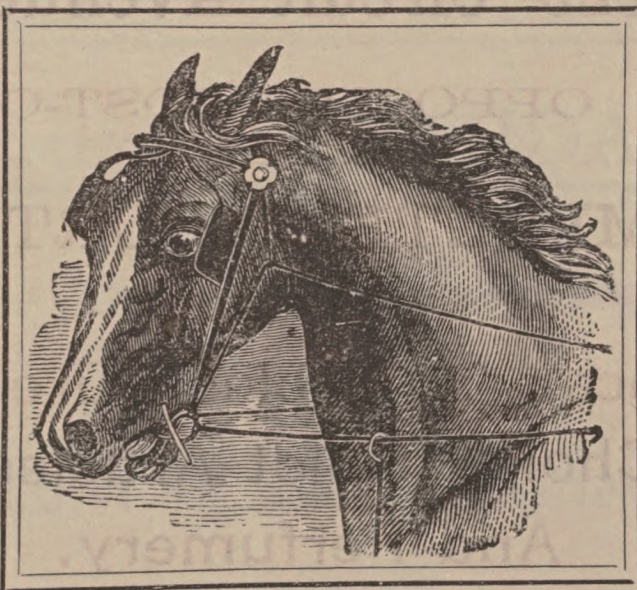
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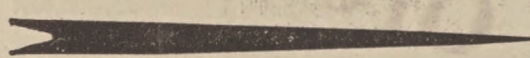
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